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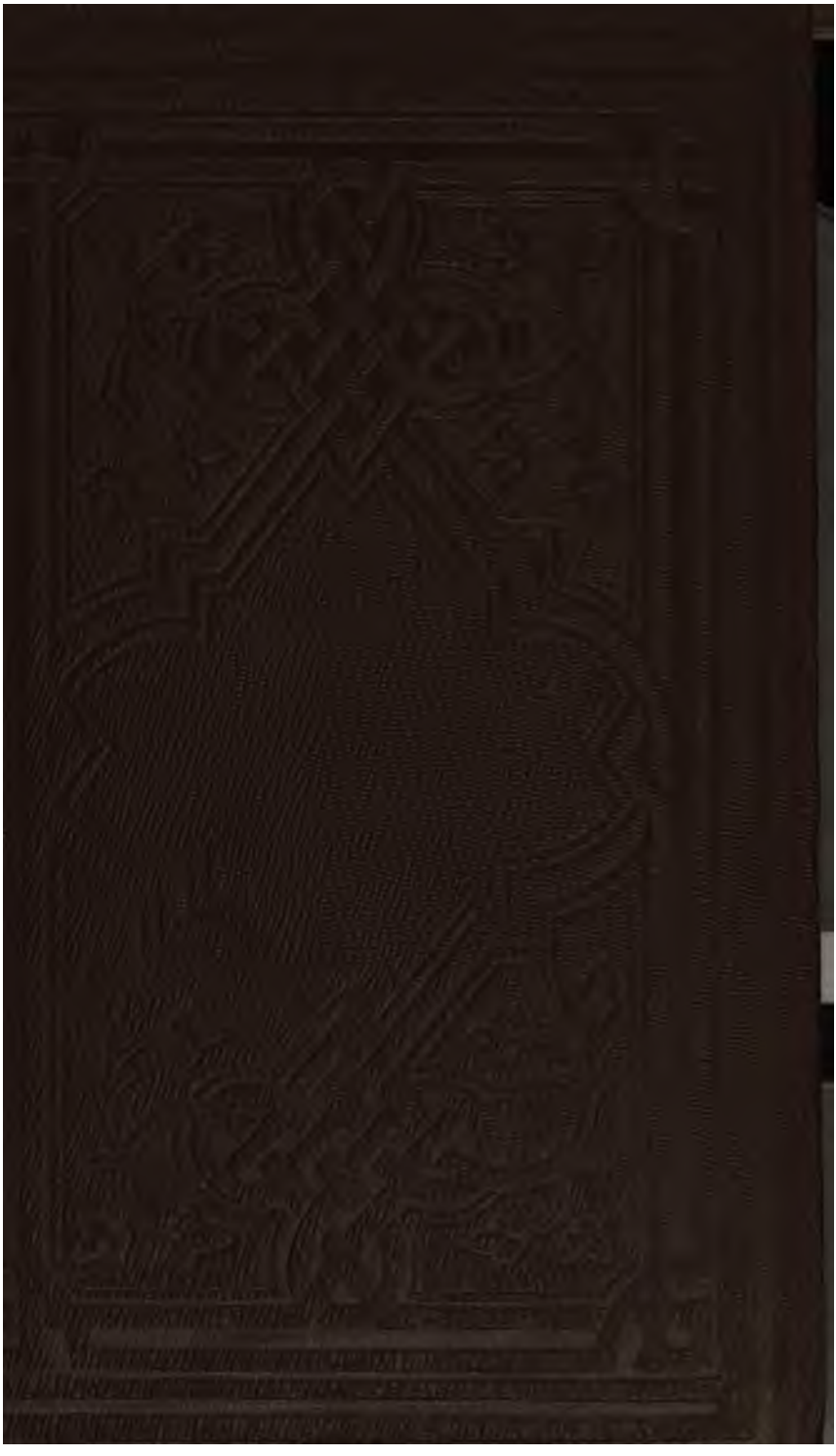

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MR. AND MRS. ASHETON.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"MARGARET AND HER BRIDESMAIDS,"

"THE LADY OF GLYNNE," &c.

"Be satisfied;
Something thou hast to bear through womanhood—
Peculiar suffering answering to the sin;
Some pang paid down for each new human life;
Some weariness in guarding such a life—
Some coldness from the guarded; some mistrust
From those thou hast too well served; from those beloved
Too loyally, some treason; feebleness
Within thy heart, and cruelty without;
And pressures of an alien tyranny,
With its dynastic reasons of larger bones
And stronger sinews. But go to!—thy love
Shall chant itself its own beatitudes,
After its own life-working. A child's kiss
Set on thy sighing lips, shall make thee glad;
A poor man served by thee, shall make thee rich;
An old man helped by thee, shall make thee strong.
Thou shalt be served thyself, by every sense
Of service which thou renderest."—*E. B. Barrett.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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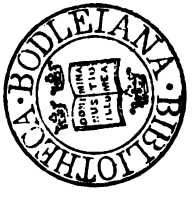

This Tale,

IS DEDICATED TO

THE THREE CHILDREN,

WHO MADE SUNLIGHT FOR THEIR MOTHER,

ON THE DARKEST DAY.

MR. AND MRS. ASHETON.

CHAPTER I.

THE MOST DIFFICULT FOR THE AUTHOR TO WRITE, STILL MORE SO FOR THE READER TO UNDERSTAND.

"AND yet it is a despicable world."

These words came, as it were involuntarily, from the lips of one whose appearance indicated little reason for so saying. He bore about him none of the marks that might betoken him to be an ill-used denizen of this anomalous world. On the contrary, he was well gifted with the exterior advan-

tages of health, strength, and comeliness; while his dress had that air of quiet elegance that belongs to the highly-born and wealthy aristocracy of England. His air —his demeanour—bore the impress of perfectness—save the expression of his face —that told its own tale. As his eyes wandered over a landscape in which a sea, a beach, masses of rocks blended with woodlands, an undulatory verdure of meadows, with ripening corn-fields, all alike gilded and brightened by a summer's sun, an involuntary admiration gave to his face a charm, the only one it lacked. But as he drank in one lovely scene after another, it clouded over. The sight of human beings evidently destroyed to him the beauty of the landscape; and not even the picturesque forms of the fishermen, busy about their herring-cobles, found favour in his sight.

"So beautiful, so fair a world, yet so barbarous a race to inhabit it."

If he said not these words, his face expressed them all too plainly. Each fresh group of the last and greatest work of the Almighty but increased his disdain of them.

And yet, if he had been asked he could not have reasonably declared that one of these despised beings had ever seriously injured him. They merely clashed against an over-fastidious mind, that fretted itself into an habitual discontent from an habitual warfare against them.

All that he could see around him—the earth teeming with riches, the rose-bedecked cottages embosomed in greenest foliage, the lordly mansion holding high guardianship over wood, field, and dwelling—all that he could see on land was his, or, rather, would be his, in virtue of heirship; nothing but sea and sky, that was within

compass of his vision, owned other sway than his own. For though his father was yet living, such was the confidence placed in this the only son, that the elder Mr. Asheton ruled but through the wishes of that son, and issued no other commands than those which were already desired by the younger.

Born with every advantage that the most favoured son of Fortune could desire, few were so truly unfortunate in the results. His wealth but fed the morbid exclusiveness of his feelings — his position helped to prevent that collision with the world which a profession would have forced upon him. And his family heaped up stone upon stone of pride and prejudice, until he was walled in behind a mass of habits, rules, and ceremonies, that destroyed every chance of his being happy himself, or making others so.

Yet was he gifted from birth with kindly

dispositions, a generous heart, a frank nature; in the school of over-refinement and fastidious notions he had not yet discovered the use of such good qualities. He was clever, but his talents were useless, being entangled in a net of prejudices. He felt that yearning or vacancy of brain and heart, which a really good and fine disposition will experience when its possessor leads an idle and useless life, but he had not the slightest conception how to rid himself of it. Had he been advised to mix with his fellow mortals, and partake of their duties and pleasures, he would have shuddered as children do at nauseous physic, and turned from the adviser with gentlemanly and courteous disgust. For, let him be ever so bored—let him have a sudden and unexpected encounter with loud, healthy, and irrepressible vulgarity, he always acted with the utmost refinement of politeness. Though suffering tortures mentally,

he, fortunately born an Asheton, never forgot it. They were not without the idea (which, though unspoken, was, nevertheless, an accredited notion among them) that Ashetons had been created, and born among, and lived with the rest of the world, as shining lights for the purpose of showing what it ought to contain, and that, but for these Ashetons, it would sink at once into a receptacle for clods of the very earth from which they came; an immense bore to the Ashetons, and a grievance that put a mark upon all their countenances, sealing them with the unmistakable stamp of elevated noses and declining mouths. And it was in reference to the perpetuating the race of Asheton, a gift so necessary to the world, that was putting young Mr. Asheton into an extra state of pettishness and disgust this lovely July morning.

Only the evening before had his parents

been delicately insinuating how they longed to see him married. It was against the rules of the Ashetons to discuss so delicate a matter openly. Yet, ever since his birth, no other thought had occupied the minds of his adoring parents, than who could, or would, prove a fitting mate for one so faultless as their Godfrey. The peerage had been consulted, royal princesses glanced at, noble and illustrious commoners by no means neglected. As in the case of the superiority of the Asheton race being a sort of family fact, felt, but not mentioned, so was the marriage of the young heir of Asheton Court always the uppermost thought in the minds of those most interested in him, yet never openly discussed. But he was now twenty-seven years old. How it had come to pass that none of those little ladies born in the same fortunate year, and whose ducal fathers, or countess mothers, had so negli-

gently married them to anyone, without coming to seek for the peerless Godfrey, they could not explain.

To ordinary mortals, it was obvious that, unless they ventured out into the world themselves to show their wares, the buying and selling in their matrimonial market would be on a very limited scale. No princess came within the horizon of their hemisphere. Even one of their own stamp, a wealthy and ancient house, unennobled but by their own deeds, was a scarce article in their visiting-list; and it was not without a species of wondering regret that Mr. and Mrs. Asheton, in counting up the number of families to whom they might deign to ally themselves, started to find how exclusiveness, and all the train of dulness that follows, had diminished the list. No one came in state to demand their Godfrey. It never occurred to them

to go into the world they so much despised, and seek some stray pearl fitted for him. They waited at home in royal state and expectation, buoying themselves up with imaginary hopes and somewhat extravagant expectations. No one came. Their Godfrey was still unwedded.

At first they were inclined to murmur that heaven had been so unkind as not to produce a feminine counterpart of their Godfrey. Again, as years went on, they ceased to murmur over an impossibility, and began to question a probability, namely, that—

> "Some of those they rejected before
> Might now do vastly well."

They realised the truth of an old song. In fact their anxiety was becoming unbearable; and provided Godfrey married anyone of good birth, unquestionable beauty,

and faultless manners, they would overlook every other disadvantage. Then they would require nothing further of heaven than to permit them to see that the essential race of Asheton was not likely to become extinct. Like the more common atoms of mortality, they would betake themselves to dust and ashes, trusting their souls to the general heaven for all, which was so far amiable in them, because, from the manner in which they kept aloof from their fellow mortals on earth, it might have been expected that they would demand a peculiar abode for Ashetons in heaven. They were not wholly unreasonable. In fact, if an impartial judge had to pronounce an opinion upon them, he would have said, "They were good sort of people in their way, and no one's enemy but their own."

They were in ignorance of the fact that

they owed it wholly to themselves, they had not yet discovered how full of hidden beauty and modest virtue is this much-abused world of ours. What they lost by their exclusiveness; what they missed by their oversensitiveness; what they never saw by the fear of seeing too much; what was unknown to them, because they were enclosed in a fog of Asheton scruples, everyone knew but themselves. Upon the whole, narrow as they had made their circle, and straightened as was the horizon of their experience, they were people of enlarged and generous views. They were also, as people of that peculiar bent are, open to any amount of "gullism," which, when their natural good common sense penetrated it, only increased their family disgust of the human race. Models of truth and honour, they turned aside a subterfuge, and swept away an artifice, with unsparing rectitude. Thus they

were highly respected and entirely disliked.

However, we must return to young Mr. Asheton. He knew his parents wished him to marry, and he certainly desired to oblige them. As one mode of doing so, he wandered by the sea, recalling to mind all the young ladies whom he had ever known, as a means of selecting one, and the result, sad to say, was expressed in those memorable words with which we began this chapter.

Diving, as novelists have the privilege to do, still deeper into the heart of Mr. Asheton, we shall there discover that, much as he had reason to be disgusted with the male sex, he thought humanely of them in comparison of the other.

"Why, why did not heaven grant my father and mother the reasonable number of sons that other less gifted families than ours possess? I should then have been able to

devote my life to their society and comfort, rejoicing in their companionship alone, while my brothers could have perpetuated our honoured name. Why was I born so exclusively an Asheton? What injustice to me, of Fate, of Nature, of Education, to make women so peculiarly obnoxious, so utterly unfeminine, so unwomanly in their ways—so unlovely."

"Sir, pray help us!"

Godfrey started. Upon his arm lay a little hand, whose fingers looked like, and touched him as if they were, flakes of snow.

A fresh girlish face, innocent and lovely as the visions in a child's dream, looked up earnestly to his.

"My cousin is afraid. See! she sits there, and the tide has risen; she fears to be drowned; you did not listen to her calls so I have come to ask your aid."

Godfrey's ideas were running upon his last words, "unfeminine, unlovely." He had to recall them both on the spot, though she was dripping with wet, and the spray hanging on her disordered curls.

"Sir, pray help us," she repeated.

"Willingly," he answered at last, "but how?"

"You must go up to that rock, and carry her down. I have been twice, but she is afraid to trust me."

He looked at her wet garments, and then glanced at his own faultless and dry continuations.

"Yes," said she, as if in answer, "they will get very wet; but if you will go and comfort her, I will run for one of the fishermen."

"Not on any account," answered he, courteously; "why should I fear wetting any more than yourself?"

A quick little sort of comical look glanced up from her eyes to his, then she became demure, as if to make up for even the wish to laugh.

"Your cousin is, I see, Miss Flower. She ought to have known the rapid movements of the tide on this shore, surely."

"It seems she did not," answered the little grave maiden.

"And you?—did not you know?" he asked.

"No; I have been here but a short time."

"I thought so; I do not remember to have seen you before."

The shrieks of the lady on the rock now rose loud and shrill, caused by the somewhat rude embrace of a white-crested wave. The little maiden looked up doubtingly into Mr. Asheton's face. He smiled.

She did not then know how rare such a smile was, but she was fully alive to the beauty of it. He waited to see if she meant to speak, but she appeared instinctively to know he would do what he could, without an order from her.

Pleased either with this silent mark of confidence, or her prettiness, he waded through the impatient hurrying waves, regardless of the utter destruction of his faultless boots, forgetting the cause of his unwonted situation in the novelty of feeling an interest about a female barbarian. But that sensation vanished as he felt himself suddenly clasped tightly round the neck by a screaming woman, who implored him to save her, in terms more energetic than elegant. His slow and dignified movements by no means kept pace with her fears, and he longed to drop her into the water, as she shrieked in his ear:—

"Oh! my goodness me, make haste, make haste, will you? I'll be drowned, I know I'll be drowned!"

One of the peculiar sensitivenesses of the Ashetons was a weakness for good grammar. It was with a great feeling of relief that he deposited this desperate violater of so many grammatical rules on the sands, hoping to be rid of her. But still in a high state of nervous agitation, she clung the closer, the more he tried to release her.

The little maiden came to his rescue, and, interposing her figure, gradually transferred the clutch of fear from his neck to her own.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Asheton," said she, and she glanced at his wet garments, as much as to say, "you will do well to go home now, and change."

"You, also, ought to do the same," answered he, aloud.

"Dear, dear, dear! but am I saved? My goodness, what a fright I was in. I thought I'd be drowned. I am sure I'll never go there again—that I won't, and I am so much obliged to you, Mr. Asheton."

"Nay, do not thank me, Miss Flower; your little cousin deserves your greatest thanks."

"That she does, a little stupid thing, as if I would let her try to carry me! We should both have been drowned then, and what a thing that would have been."

The innocent eyes of the little maiden laughed, though she said nothing. Godfrey actually convicted himself with the wish that she would speak. He apologised to himself by mentally saying she had a soft, low voice, musical withal.

"Suppose we make a move homewards," said he, graciously.

That is, he alone felt his manner was

urbane for him, because Miss Flower was evidently yet absorbed in her own escape, and the little Miss Flower was apparently unaware of the peculiar gift of Ashetons, and could therefore make no comparisons.

"Your cousin has not been with you long, Miss Flower?"

"No, she has not; that is, she came last Wednesday week—I do not know, Friday—was it Friday, or Wednesday? It couldn't be Friday, that's such an unlucky day."

"It was Wednesday," interposed the little cousin.

"Are you superstitious?" asked Mr. Asheton, turning to her.

"I think not. I take life as it comes; there is enough in every day, of good and evil, without anticipating."

Godfrey was pleased. Beyond Miss Flower's constant ejaculations of thanks and bewailments, nothing more was said, but as

he raised his hat to bid them adieu at his own gate, the exceeding courtesy and deference with which he did it, drew a blush to the cheek of the little unknown, while her cousin said, "What a polite man he is."

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH THE AUTHOR BEING WELL SETTLED IN THE SADDLE, THE READER MAY SAFELY FOLLOW.

Mr. Godfrey Asheton was dressing for dinner. His valet, apparently born for the express purpose of waiting upon an Asheton, betrayed not the most remote symptom of astonishment at the unwonted condition of his master's garments. A spectator might have imagined it was the daily routine of Mr. Asheton to wade through sea-water, come home to dress,

merely saying, as a matter of course, "I no longer require that suit of clothes." Not that his coat was much the worse, but it shared the fate of the rest of the suit. In consequence, it might strongly be suspected, of the few tears that poor nervous Miss Flower had shed upon it in her brief possession of a citadel no other female had ever stormed and taken.

Had these drops been of pure sea-water, Mr. Asheton might have held them innocuous; but being human, of the race barbarian, of the genus feminine, the coat was condemned at once.

Mr Godfrey Asheton went down to dinner, as faultlessly arrayed as if to dine with Her Majesty. But that was only due to his family. Any person ennobled by title, or without the necessary quantity of limbs, laying them down as useless appendages in the service of his country), or a notable

inventor of patents, or a wonderful performer on anything in any way, could dine with Her Majesty. But to dine *en famille* with the Ashetons was the privilege of none but an Asheton. The dinner passed off nearly as usual. A nervous young footman rattled two plates together, which caused Mr. Godfrey Asheton to remark to the butler:—

"That must not occur again."

"It shall not, Mr. Godfrey," was his reply.

"Quite right, my dear son," said his father

"Unpardonable," murmured his mother.

Which remarks reduced the object of them to a state of mental imbecility. Luckily his services were not missed, two brother footmen being at hand.

The repast ended, the desert arranged, the wine poured out, Mr. Payne, the butler, took one glance to see that everything was as it ought to be, and then, with a profound

reverence, retired. Had we been there, the picture would have tempted us to linger over the scene.

A large lofty room, on whose walls hung pictures of stately dames and noble warriors; though life-size, scarce looked they so in that spacious apartment. A bronzed chandelier, burnished with a golden edge, bore on its many branches tinted crystallised globes, that cast a lively glow on the table beneath, while they were reflected back in miniature gleams, and wreathless numbers — a whole cluster in the rich chalice that held the sugar; a sparkling rosy lot, seen in the ruby wine, one stamped on each purple grape, then, large, full, and golden, on the yellow oranges, until it was impossible to say where they were not, the whole deeply coloured and enriched by the reflection of crimson velvet curtains; while they, as most befitted, were enlivened with broad golden borders, and heavy silken

fringe, tasselled with balls and cords of bullion.

An ancient sideboard, deeply carved and inlaid with mirrors, reached the ceiling, reflecting back the pictures in various and ever-changing forms.

Ordinary mortals might, perhaps, on that summer evening, have drawn back the heavy curtains, let in the soft summer night, and feasted in the sweet twilight. But Ashetons always dined by lamp-light; and spite of the cool loveliness without, the picture was beautiful within. Neither did the magnificence of the pictures at all detract from the appearance of the living objects in the room. They were all three worthy specimens of the race from which they sprung; old age looking as lovely as youth in the persons of Mr. and Mrs. Asheton.

It was not until Godfrey had critically drank his first glass of wine that he spoke of his adventure.

"My dear mother, are you aware that a third Miss Flower has come to the Rectory?"

Struck, as by an electric shock, that her Godfrey should mention a young lady at all, Mrs. Asheton was too truly an Asheton to exhibit the least emotion.

"No, my dear son, I never even heard of another daughter."

"She is not a daughter—she is a cousin."

Mr. Asheton, (aroused like his wife):—"Have you seen her, Godfrey?"

Godfrey. "I saw her to-day, under peculiar circumstances. She acted well."

A deep pause, during which Mrs. Asheton's thoughts, after the manner of feminine thoughts, jumped to a thousand conclusions, and galloped over an incredible quantity of circumstances. Mr. Asheton, being a man, and, therefore, less imaginative, recovered soonest.

Mr. Asheton. "May we ask, how, my dear son."

To this question he graciously responded, giving a short account of his adventure, saying, in conclusion:—

"There was a great contrast in the conduct of the two young ladies: one, quiet and lady-like, the other — as she always is."

Mr. Asheton. "True, my dear Godfrey; poor Priscilla Flower is much to be pitied for a total lack of anything refined. It is marvellous to me that her beautiful sister has not imparted to her some of her grace and ease."

Mr. Asheton and his wife both cast sidelong glances at their son. The eldest Miss Flower was one of those whom, formerly rejecting, they would now gladly accept as a daughter-in-law.

If Godfrey saw these furtive glances, he

paid no heed to them, but remarked with quiet imperturbability:—

"An amalgamation would be quite impossible. The beauty and grace that Miss Flower inherits from her Italian mother, could never be grafted on the child of the present Mrs. Flower."

N.B., and aside. Mrs. Flower was the *bête noir* of the whole Asheton race.

Godfrey (continuing). "And yet it is strange that Miss Flower should not have inherited, what I have always been told is a peculiar mark of the Italian race, small hands and feet."

Mr. Asheton (hurriedly). "Has Miss,—has the new Miss Flower, the cousin, small hands and feet?"

Godfrey (dryly, as if speaking of a mummy.) "Remarkably so."

Mr. Asheton exchanged glances again with his wife, whose ideas again flew off.

She soon recovered, though, brought back by the emergency of the case.

Mrs. Asheton. "It is about the usual time that I call at Wood Head. Shall you accompany me, my dear Mr. Asheton?"

Mr. Asheton. "I shall be glad to do so. It is some time, too, since we had the Flowers to dinner."

Mrs. Asheton. "I will look in my visiting-book. I think with you, Mr. Asheton, that the time is approaching when, according to custom, they may be expecting an invitation to dinner."

Godfrey. "How shall you go to-morrow."

Amazement kept both parents silent.

"If you use the chariot, I can ride; otherwise, my dear mother, with a groom as outrider, I can drive you and my father in the pony-carriage."

Mr. Asheton. "An excellent arrangement."

Mrs. Asheton (her thoughts jumping far into the future, so that, regarding this visit as one of ceremony to a future Mrs. Asheton, it ought to be performed *en grande tenue*) "I rather think the chariot will be the most proper. The new young lady might take umbrage."

Godfrey (smiling in spite of himself). "Pardon me, dear mother; she appears but a child. I scarcely think she would consider the visit to herself."

A little dismay entered the hearts of both parents. Whatever castles they had been building must now be pulled down. She was only a child.

Meantime, another dinner was also being served and eaten, about the same hour, at which we again recognize Miss Flower and her cousin. No graceful pictures hang upon these walls, for in truth the room is but low-roofed, and, though

spacious, has no look of lofty grandeur as portrayed in the one we have just left.

There are three windows in it, all open too — letting in the sweet scents and sounds of a flower-garden. But the third is oriel built, and hangs over the sea, until it became no great stretch of fancy to imagine oneself within the deck cabin of one of Her Majesty's largest ships. Well worn was the carpet within the window space; rarely was the low seat that surrounded it unoccupied; it seized a stranger's fancy at once, irresistibly impelling him to sit therein, while to the occupiers of that house, what stores of thoughts, feelings, words could not that oriel window divulge? To what breathings of conflicting emotions had it not been privy? And what everlasting changing picture did it not give back in return, each most lovely of their kind?

No velvet curtains, with embroidered border, clung lovingly around this beautiful window, but those of well glazed chintz, gorgeous with cabbage roses, and banded with green trellis-work, as if to make believe that roses grew out of the waves. Within the room, the last rays of the sun reflected back no images of himself in burnished silver or golden fruit, but, on the contrary, glanced provokingly upon the round, good-tempered face of the young lady of the morning's adventures. In vain she moved her chair, called the sun names, and finally jumped up energetically, and drew down the blind, exclaiming :—

"What a tiresome thing the sun is!"

"Oh, cousin!"

Low was this said by her little companion of the morning, and heard by none other. And she noticed it no fur-

ther than putting on a certain expression of countenance that said "stuff."

The room was not tidy, the appointments of the dinner-table were meagre and common-place. The cloth was not straight, the dishes ill-arranged, yet the sumptuous adornments of Asheton Court, faded before the fresh fair face of the young stranger.

It was no particular beauty of feature or complexion, but the expression was so innocent and confiding, the lips so freshly red, the eyes so healthily bright and intelligent, and the figure so lithesome. And yet, near her, in strong contrast, such as few could have borne without suffering in comparison, sat a young girl in the fullest bloom of Italian beauty, blended in a remarkable manner with the Saxon; much above the common stature, with a faultless figure and that beautifully-shaped throat and head that give

a regal air to even faulty dimensions—dark hair shading off into many rays of sunny gold, with darker eyes and a fair complexion, Beatrice Flower was an unusual type of beauty, and she knew it, and so did all her family. And she and they may all be forgiven for thinking Asheton Court was no more than a fitting offering to lay at her feet. And it is astonishing that Mr. Godfrey Asheton did not think so too, despite her hands and feet being larger than he deemed proper. In fact, it is extremely probable that eventually, overcome by relentless time, and no worthier object presenting herself, Beatrice would have had the vacant throne offered for her acceptance. At the bottom of the table sat a fine aristocratic looking man, with the fair fresh complexion so common to England. His head was picturesque, almost bald, with rings of fine, fair, now rather white hair, curling all round it. Blue eyes, large and well

developed, with scarcely a mark of the "crows' feet." Life had evidently been pleasant to him. You saw it in the calm, satisfied expression of his face, in the manner that he leant back in his chair, in the very mode of crossing his legs.

There was one little line on his forehead, caused by an episode in early life, of which we will give a history in due course. But he never turned towards his present wife, that this wrinkle did not somehow disappear. Like many another besides himself, Mr. Flower's personal appearance always charmed at first sight—but by degrees, as the acquaintance ripened, and interchange of opinions, sentiments, might be expected, Mr. Flower lost ground. He was good to look at, but heavy to entertain, and this appeared the greater marvel as he was known to have been in his youth a gay and jovial companion. The change

in his character was noticed after the infliction of the wrinkle.

But Miss Flower is speaking, her beautiful cheek flushed with annoyance.

Miss Flower. "I knew, Priscilla, that you were utterly deficient in mere common sense, but that you should have outraged all propriety, besides proving yourself most ridiculous, to such a man as Mr. Asheton, is peculiarly annoying—to me."

Mrs. Flower (mouth and eyes wide open). "Dear, dear."

Prissy. "Well, 'tis no use being angry, because it's done. I might have not done it, but as I did do it, why it's done."

Beatrice. "Poor consolation for me. Mr. Asheton will, I know, think over this scene for months, and shun our society as long as he remembers it."

Prissy (stoutly). "Then he will take a great deal of trouble for nothing."

"I am sure I have almost forgotten it already."

Miss Flower (disgusted and turning to her cousin). "And you, child, have you never learnt that under no possible circumstance ought a young lady to address a gentleman as you appear to have assaulted Mr. Asheton."

Mrs. Flower. "Dear, dear."

Prissy. "She is a very good little thing, and she never assaulted him at all. He was doing something or another, rhapsodizing, or some such nonsense, and never heeding me at all, though I called him by his name, and she just touched him on his arm like that, and I defy any one to say that's an assault. And if he says it's an assault—why—"

Miss Flower. "Cease, Priscilla; when shall I ever teach you to take things less literally? It is not that I so much care

as to whether Mr. Asheton is offended or not, but our little cousin is sent to us for guidance and protection. You will allow you are utterly unfitted for the charge, and therefore it devolves on me."

The little cousin stole her hand into Prissy's with a smile.

Prissy. "Oh, nonsense! you must not mind me, but do as Beatrice says. Mustn't she, mamma?"

Mrs. Flower (recovering). "True, my dear. Of course Beatrice knows what is most best, does she not, my dear Constant?"

Mr. Flower bowed in assent. It was only in the reading-desk and pulpit that his voice was ever heard, for he was a clergyman. Then, indeed, he made up for his silence during the week, and justified his wife's fond belief that the sermons of her Constant were a panacea for all ills.

Prissy's rejection of her cousin's demonstration in her favour had no effect.

The little thing (not so little either) rose from her chair, kissed Prissy, and then drawing herself up after the manner of Beatrice when in a lofty mood, said in the low clear voice for which she was remarkable:—

"I should do as I did to-day, again to-morrow, if Prissy wished it."

CHAPTER III.

THE AUTHOR RELATES THE HISTORY OF HIS PUPPETS ERE HE PUTS THEM IN MOTION.

MR. CONSTANTINE FLOWER was the second son of a general officer, who, early widowed, had to leave his two children to be cared for and educated by any relation who would undertake the charge, he, meanwhile, fighting his country's battles wherever needed.

It is astonishing how such children thrive. How, bandied about from one set

of people to another, they contrive to make themselves perfectly at home with all; picking up experience and information as chickens pick up crumbs, and becoming far more valuable members of society than the expensively-educated, the fondly-cared for, and devotedly-loved children of adoring parents.

Captain, Major, Colonel, and General Flower, as he became in course of time, and the favourite of the Horse Guards, heard but one character of his sons from all quarters, and when the eldest joined him as junior ensign in his own regiment, he was quite of opinion that nothing had been said too much. Popular as the Colonel was himself, his son soon surpassed him. Never had the regiment possessed so handsome, so gallant, so true a gentleman and soldier as Osman Flower. And he completed the measure of their content-

ment by falling in love with, and obtaining the hand of, one they truly considered as the "Daughter of the Regiment."

She had been born in the regiment, and was the child of the then second in command, Major Aubray. The fairest, smallest myth of a thing to be called mortal. It was, therefore, but right she should fall into the hands of one so tender, so true, as valiant in deeds, as he was powerful to perform. They followed the fortunes of the regiment wherever it went, alike the ornament, boast, and pride of it. Their first child they had been compelled to send to England, while they were quartered in India, to the care of old Mrs. Aubray, who could form some idea of her unknown son-in-law, from the lovely features of his child. She bid fair to be a feminine type of him. It was not until eight years after her birth, that another daughter was granted them.

And then, as if to indemnify themselves for the sacrifice they had made in giving up the one, also being quartered in a more healthy climate, and this little thing being a species of elfin mortal, like her mother, they could not find it in their hearts to part with her.

No matter where they went, how they travelled, there was always some one ready to carry the baby. And the rougher their life, the more she appeared to thrive. It would seem incredible to relate the various adventures, the strange life, the different nurses, the odd playfellows, that fell to the lot of this little creature. No one ever taught her anything, yet she learned by intuition. Evil passed over and by her, as rain drops on crystal globes. Sickness assailed all around her, she ever remained beaming and bright; and when, at last, her little fairy mother began to feel that the rest and quiet she had never had,

could now alone keep her frail life within her, then did her father bless the day she was born, and thank God for the gift of her presence. She was to her mother as dew to thirsty ground, as liberty to prisoners, as light to the blind; and all this from a loving, natural gaiety of heart, and a perception of what was most fitting to be done. Better gifts than learning or physic, in some cases. But a little time more, and the fond, proud old grandfather, the pride of the regiment, his handsome son, with the little ailing mother, and the darling of all their hearts, were to leave the beloved regiment, and join for good the long separated one, who would not take to herself the love of another heart, until her vows were sanctioned by their presence. In that short space a battle was fought; two lay side by side on that battle field, dead; and ere the weeping soldiers had time

to prepare their graves, room had to be made for a third. She took but little space, the "daughter of the regiment."

While the darling of them all has just avowed herself the champion of the amiable but nervous Prissy; and having been accustomed to love so much, is now pouring out the treasure of her affections upon every thing that will permit her to do so. At present, Prissy and the wild pigeons on the sea cliffs have it all—for Beatrice is cold. Beatrice has hitherto been Miss Flower. To give way to a little uneducated, untamed childish child of seventeen, is hard. Mrs. Flower is always so excessively busy with everybody's concerns, is so much interested about Betty James's husband having gone off, and Susan Smears's children having every symptom of the measles, that she has not time to attend to anything her little

niece has to say—while Mr. Flower kissed her, said she was welcome, and has never spoken to her since. But she is not unhappy. She has seen too much of life, of people, of changes, for all they think she is a mere child, to do otherwise than to make the best of everything as it comes. She is infinitely amused at, and charmed with, Prissy. And could she but dismiss from her dreams that one week of terrible anguish, followed by the long voyage of such desolate woe—could she recall the exquisite happiness of being met and claimed by her sister, who more than realized all she had heard of her, all she had dreamed of her, and yet not fail to remember how, by slow degrees, some fatal shadow had fallen between her and the husband she loved so well, darkening their house with some coming ill, that made the elder sister hurriedly re-

move the younger one from beneath its dread influence—could she forget all this and yet be happy? She could, for she had a wonderfully buoyant spirit. She had satisfied herself that her absence was expedient, and as she had always acted by her mother, so she did by her sister, cheerfully obeying her. Her winning, tender letters, full of girlish glee, she felt, rather than knew, would be her sister's best cordial under a separation that both felt now much more than they would have done had they never met.

Whether her presence was particularly welcome or not to her unknown relations, she did not think it wise to inquire. For theirs was her only home at present, until her sister could receive her again. And that hope was, like all other hopes, clouded with fear. She did not doubt that they would love her; she could love so well in

return. If she was a little disappointed at first in her aunt and uncle, she quickly understood their characters, and took what love they had to give, as the best they had to bestow. But it is time to relate the younger brother's history, and how he became marked with that one wrinkle.

Constantine Flower had, as well as his elder brother, the offer of a commission in the army, but his tastes did not incline that way. Colonel Flower could afford to let him wander about the world for a few years, that he might see what it was like, ere he settled down for life, and rather encouraged his wish to do so. If he was to become a clergyman, he would be none the worse for acting layman a few years, and getting rid of a certain narrowness of opinions and ways, that is apt to clog the best intentions of those who live in one habitual life and routine.

He visited his father and brother. He went over to America and saw Niagara, but it is supposed he was not astonished, as he never talked about it. He loved Italy well, and wandered about in it with a true relish for its clear skies, picturesque children, wonderful artistic beauties, and *dolce-far-niente* ways. He carried this liking so far, that he fell in love with an Italian girl of a noble family in Rome. To a man of Mr. Flower's temperament, falling in love was a regular disease. When quiet men take the infection, they have it to the very heart. He rushed over to Spain in the only violent fit of excitement in which he was ever seen, his father being quartered there. This worthy man, feeling that as a father he had been prevented fulfilling a father's duties towards his children, was the more willing to grant them all their desires, if it were in his power; especially with sons old

enough to judge for themselves. He contented himself with saying:—

"That as long as there was an English girl to love him, he would never have asked a foreigner to be the wife of his bosom, but that his son might please himself, and take his father's blessing into the bargain."

Constantine was well content, more especially as his poor ignorant father had never seen the adored object, and little knew of whom he was speaking in such disparaging terms. But his father did more. He made over to him such money as was eventually to be his. Therefore, the course of his love run so smooth that he was enabled to be married within a month of his return to Rome.

But, old proverbs perversely making themselves heard, as it were, or rather felt, Mr. Flower was to experience his misfortunes after marriage, instead of before. He was a quiet,

amiable, domestic man, guileless and warm-hearted as most Englishmen are, when they break through the fog of reserve.

He was gregarious, and liked to enjoy life, with smiling faces round him, and happy voices, in a genial hum, buzzing on all sides.

He enjoyed comfortable little tea-parties, with games of proverbs, forfeits, and such like as adjuncts. He was charmed to do a service for anyone, old woman or young one, it was the same to him—though perhaps he chatted and laughed rather more with the latter than the former.

And this happy-hearted fellow had allied himself in holy matrimony to a dark-browed reserved Italian girl, whose manners were deep and mysterious as the colour of her black fathomless eyes. Within six months Mr. Flower had well-nigh wished himself safely tied to the ugliest Englishwoman he

had ever seen, provided she was not jealous.

It was all very well to be loved in this frantic manner for a short time. But never to have one moment's peace; not to be able to look out of a window; not to dare to speak to a woman; not to eat, drink, sleep, without scenes that rendered the first unnecessary, the second but too necessary, and the third a hopeless attempt—all these things combined, changed the hilarious young Englishman into a pale, melancholy ghost of himself.

In vain he gave way, until he laughed at himself for his folly. The more he succumbed, the more exacting became his beautiful, adored Magdelena.

Perhaps she was an exaggerated type of her race; perhaps she had heard that Englishmen are inconstant as butterflies. Perhaps Mr. Flower was to have a practical lesson,

for despising and laughing at his father's preference for an English wife. But whatever might have been the cause, about a year after his marriage, he was seen rushing from his own house, without his hat, and evidently bent upon doing something very violent—as many Englishmen do when in a passion—and no one heard any tidings of him for three days. Even then he might not have discovered his retreat, but for startling events at home, which rumour spread far and wide enough to reach his ears.

His Magdelena, taking advantage of her interesting situation, had been more than usually provoking and violent on that day on which he was seen to leave the house, and feeling unable to command his temper, he had left her mistress of the field.

He had done so before, for a few hours, and returned always calm and in as happy a mood as circumstances would permit.

But when the whole day passed, then a night, and another day, remorse and horror seized on the soul of the passionate Magdelena. She became as frantic from fear, as she had been before from jealousy; and was firmly persuaded that her husband had destroyed himself, rather than incur her anger again. Judging of him by herself, she pictured him throwing himself down from the topmost ruin of the Colosseum; or unconcerned, in the hot distemper of his soul, as to whether he drowned himself in clean or dirty water, had flung himself into the muddy yellow Tiber.

Probably she would have been more disgusted at seeing him calmly discussing a quiet dinner in a distant village, looking more happy and contented than she, or any other person, had seen him for some time, than if she had herself discovered his mangled remains, or fished up his drowned body with

her own hand. Mr. Flower knew his fate was a very bad one, with every prospect that it would be worse, yet to make away with himself, as the best means of escaping it, was about the last idea to enter his unsophisticated mind. But the two fits, jealousy and fear, proved too strong for even an Italian frame to bear. The beautiful Magdelena raved herself into a premature confinement; and though she was told her child not only lived, but was likely to do so, she deemed it no more than just that as the soul of the father had already reached purgatory, the mother ought to go and see how it fared there.

She resolutely refused food, or the commonest precaution, and died a victim to her temper and passions just one hour before Mr. Flower entered the door of his house again, in full bodily presence.

He was too good and tender-hearted not to

mourn her sincerely; and after burying her with all honour and solemnity, he bid adieu to her family with abundance of tears, leaving at their request his little motherless daughter to their care; and after various adventures suitable to such a character, he finally took orders, and became a quiet, easy, contented parson, with nothing to remind him of his Italian episode but a yearning sort of paternal feeling.

This he could only indulge in—namely, the presence of his child—on one condition, said her relations. He must provide her with a suitable mother.

With many misgivings he at last accomplished the matter.

That the second Mrs. Flower should be an exact contrast to the first, every reader must expect. Indeed, she was so very much the reverse, Mr. Flower was quite remorseful, not to say fearful, lest the shade of Magdelena

might resent such an insult. Fair, blue-eyed, and rosy, Mrs. Flower was a good specimen of an English girl, and Colonel Flower could say nothing against his son's choice this time, if that was the only quality he required. But Mr. Flower, as we have noticed, had been very wary in his choice, and his English wife was chiefly remarkable for the most invariable good-humour, and a habit of being pleased with everything, no matter of what order or kind.

Now this description of person is in general much despised by the wiser, more censorious world, who think that those "charmed" with everything are so because they have not wits sufficient to judge otherwise, and yet (granting them to be somewhat deficient, though sometimes happy in the category of "where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise") how blest is that neighbourhood in which such a character resides.

Alike despised, yet alike in constant request, the good-natured, ever-charmed fool, be it he or she, is welcome everywhere, and acts upon a dull and selfish lot of people as a warm fire on the benighted and half-frozen. True, they may sometimes be very provoking, and praise the wrong thing at a perversely wrong time; and, also, they may be too officious, offering their services at an inappropriate and inappreciable time, though the week before, these had been patronisingly demanded, and unconsciously drawn upon.

Nevertheless, it is all the same to the good-tempered fool, whether snubbed or appreciated, turned out or sent for, scolded or thanked, that invariable sweet temper carries him over, above, through all; and at last, when he is dead, and the heavy soil of earth, twelve feet in depth above him, separating him so effectually from the world that despised and laughed at

him, everybody takes out his handkerchiefs, weeps and mourns as if he had lost his dearest, best friend; and in nine cases out of ten, feel that it is so—truly.

Mr. Flower selected Mrs. Flower from a host of eligible good-natured young ladies, because he had overheard one old nurse remark to another "that never was it known, all her mortal days, that Miss Sophy had ever been seen out of temper, let 'em aggravate her ever so."

"And now, after eighteen years of matrimony, he was able to corroborate the above testimony; and under the benign auspices of such a temper, had grown into a sleek, happy, corpulent gentleman, enjoying life to the full. He had been so miserable that one year of the Italian episode, it was but reasonable to suppose he had had his share of this world's ills.

Among other qualities that Mrs. Flower

possessed was an unbounded admiration for all her husband said and did. So far from anything like jealousy, she only thought—

"Ah! how lucky So-and-so is, Constant is talking to her."

If he went off to visit some friend, and demurred at leaving her alone—

"Never care for that," says she, "think how happy they will be to have you!"

So much sweet content might have palled upon Mr. Flower, but he thought of Magdelena, and turned to his Sophy with increased affection. Indeed, her true motherly love for his little Italian girl would have bound a harsher heart than his to such a fond stepmother.

She was proud of her beauty and accomplishments, unwearied in her motherly love and care, and none had the shadow of the least suspicion to say that the step-child was less loved than her own child.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH SOME OF THE PUPPETS BEGIN TO ACT.

MR. GODFREY ASHETON had been guilty of passing his night much after the habit of an insignificant barbarian. He had dreamt a good part of it.

Three several times had he, in imagination, carried a shadowy Miss Prissy Flower through imperceptible waves, and thought himself well rewarded (this was the most wonderful and incomprehensible part of his dream) by the supposed glance of a pair

of clear and sweet eyes, that looked out upon him from what might have been meant for a cloud. In vain he endeavoured to penetrate through this veil, Miss Prissy affectionately clinging to him; he put aside and sought — he imagined himself putting aside and seeking for hours, no figure could he see—nothing but eyes.

As he thought over his dream in the morning, he solved it, by remembering that the little Miss Flower, who had besought his succour for her cousin, had beautiful eyes. The sort of eyes he liked—clear and frank. This being satisfactorily settled, he remembered the call that was intended to be made that day; and having more of his mother than his father in him, or his dream influencing him, he decided that his mother's suggestion of the manner of the call should be carried out rather than his own. It is astonishing

how people, whose wealth and position prevent their occupying themselves, as the curse pronounced on the sons of Adam dooms them, make for themselves work out of nothing. Here was a sensible, well-educated man troubling his brains about the fashion of a call upon people, one of whom he thoroughly disliked, and the others he thought little about, not even allowing to himself that a young girl, hardly yet introduced into society, was the real cause of this visit — and further debating upon what he should wear! Fortunately, that wonderful valet, who seemed to read into the innermost recesses of his master's most secret wishes, had put out the very suit. Auguring from this that the coming day was about to be a fortunate one, Mr. Godfrey Asheton descended to breakfast in a bland and satisfactory mood. In fact, the un-

lucky, nervous young footman might have rattled the plates this day with impunity. It is probable Mr. Godfrey Asheton would not have heard them. Who has not felt the influence of an unlucky day, and all the train of annoyances it brings? How, as one vexation after another arises, beginning with the moment one steps out of bed, until one has to go into it again, irresistibly comes to the memory that nursery adage, "If you do not spend Sunday well, Monday will be very unlucky, and all the days following *in crescendo*, until you come to Sunday again." Mr. Godfrey Asheton spent his days so uniformly the same, that it is hardly to be supposed he owed his unlucky days to the non-observance of the Sabbath, when he had them. And his lucky days were equally inexplicable.

Not having time, however, to follow him

through it all, we will advance at once to five o'clock, where we find him in a lane, on horseback, listening for the sound of carriage-wheels. Wonderful to relate, he is three minutes before his time. His watch must be in fault. Ere he can decide to whom he shall trust it, to be regulated, the Asheton chariot rolls into sight, and altogether they pass through the gate that leads to the Wood-head. For the rectory, meant for the rector to live in, which rector was Mr. Flower, has been abandoned to the use of curates. Its dimensions were of the smallest, its situation within the village, and its state of repair but so-so. Therefore, Mr. Flower was justified in dwelling in a larger, more commodious mansion. There is singing to night at the village school, preparatory for Sunday, whereat Mrs. Flower always presides; smilingly uncon-

scious of having gift neither of tune nor time. But this obliges them to dine at four o'clock, and the repast is just finished as the Asheton Court chariot dashes up to the door, and simultaneously the door-bell rings. Though the Ashetons have known the Flowers all their lives, they are in ignorance as to their ever dining at four o'clock. And the whiff of dinner that greets their nostrils, as the house door opens, appears to them as the dinner to be, rather than the dinner done. Mrs. Flower was now and then taken with a myth that the servants had too much to do, therefore, during the prevalence of this idea, they used but one sitting-room. Into it the Asheton Court party were ushered by the maiden, who, stolid at all times, had her wits completely scared by the bewildering manners of the Asheton Court footman, as he parleyed with her regarding the "at home"

of her mistress. She would have said "yes" under any circumstances, so that it was just as well the dinner was over. The chairs were in amiable confusion, the room redolent of rather woolly mutton, and no one in it but Mrs. Flower, who was lacing her boots, preparatory to parochial callings. Not one whit dismayed was she. Everybody ate dinners, and dinners would leave their traces behind. Everybody wore boots, and though some liked buttoned boots, she always preferred hers laced. The chairs were soon put into a formal circle, and Miss Beatrice was sent for—a host in herself. Under these circumstances, what was there to annoy Mrs. Flower? She looked upon this visit as one of the greatest friendliness, rushed headlong into family matters, as if these alone had brought Mrs. Asheton to see her. Worthy people those, who think everyone is as much interested about

their affairs as the parties themselves—but weak.

The Wood-head House was curiously situated on a cliff overlooking the sea. The situation was more singular and picturesque than convenient, for necessarily they were much cramped for room. Boundless as the view was from the oriel window, that was the sole space they had. Either to avoid the sight of Mrs. Flower, who offended his sensitive refinement in a thousand ways, or to inhale a little fresh air, or to look out upon a view, worth the infliction of Mrs. Flower's society for an hour, Godfrey soon took his seat within the oriel window, leaving his father to be entertained by Miss Beatrice, who had made her appearance.

For a short time she divided his attention with the view. She entered a room well, she walked well, she greeted people with a quiet self-possession he liked, and she was

undeniably beautiful. How well she looked in flowing circles, as he thought (which were nothing but flounces, good reader), of black silk, the body of which sat so tight to her little waist and sloping shoulders. How much the dark colour set off the rich creamy hue of her skin, and how infinitely her countenance was lighted up by most expressive eyes, that matched beautifully with her hair, now black as ebony, in that low-roofed, shadow-burdened room. But those hands—he turns away — also, as she smiles upon his father, surely she is not altogether faultless about the teeth. There is one too many, or one too few, or one too small, or the whole are not quite even, something just hits a sensitive nerve, but ere he can decide, a name strikes his ear—Mrs. Flower is telling his mother what he would wish to know.

"Dear little Puss, just about a fortnight,

quite an orphan—pretty child—but not like our Beatrice."

What more he might have heard is unknown; his attention is distracted by voices outside the window. Looking up, he saw what excited much surprise, for great interest took possession of his features, and ere long, he moved cautiously from the window, and, approaching his mother, said to Mrs. Flower:—

"Pray, pardon me, madam, for interrupting your interesting story; I beg, my dear mother, you will give me a few minutes to show you a very pretty picture."

They all followed him to the window, and looking up, saw a young girl perched upon a ledge of the rock. A little beneath her was another, who seemed oppressed with an idea that she must squeeze herself into nothing, and say "hush" all the time.

"Hush" was expressed in every atti-

tude; for above, around, far and near, flew flocks of pigeons.

As they wheeled in circles, round and round, gradually they drew nearer and nearer to the younger girl, who called to them in sweet clear voice; by degrees they settled on the cliff, at her feet, above her head, all round her, nay, upon her, fluttering, cooing, and gurgling in many stages of delight. In a few minutes they were eating out of her hand, struggling for a place in her little white apron, full of corn, kissing, cooing, coaxing her.

"It is my little childish cousin," remarked Beatrice, as they all gazed in silence; "she has some Indian method of taming birds, especially pigeons, with which Priscilla is much taken."

"How pretty she is," whispered Mrs. Asheton, as if she feared her voice would startle the group.

"Yes; is she not?" answered Mrs. Flower. "I'll have her down, for you to see. Here, Prissy, Prissy, May, come down and see Mrs. Asheton."

The mischief was done ere they could stop her.

The pigeons darkened the air in their startled flight, hardly less surprised than May herself. Mr. Asheton exclaimed at the pretty sight, as he saw her stand motionless for a moment, like a listening nymph, and then, light as snow-flakes, leap down from point to point, until at last she stood before them all, encircled like a picture in the window-frame. She smiled when she saw Mr. Godfrey Asheton, but, beyond the heightened colour caused by her speed, showed no other emotion.

"Come in, my dear, come in, and be introduced to Mrs. Asheton, who is very kind in wishing to see you."

"I will help Prissy, and return in a moment."

Some laboured puffings and stifled ejaculations betokened Prissy's near advent.

"My goodness, gracious me! I'll never go there again. I thought I should have had to stay there all my life, and so I should, if you hadn't come to help me."

These words heralded their entrance.

Marion's beauty was essentially fresh and fragrant as roses, while the innocent guilelessness of her expression made the gazer think of Eve just placed in Paradise.

At first you would be persuaded she was yet a child, and speak to her as such, but ere long the strange anomaly of staid and womanly remarks, with perfect self-possession of manner, struck the beholder as something out of the common, coming from a mere girl. She was quaintly dressed, too, like an old picture; in the unbleached

muslin of the Indies, that will take no shape but that of the wearer. Gathered round her slender waist with a blue ribbon, it was drawn together at the throat in a similar manner, in most childish fashion, but it became her wonderfully. Rich, long, disordered curls fell from beneath her white straw hat, having evidently escaped from the hold of some more blue ribbons that mingled, half untied, with her fair hair.

The three Ashetons, occupied with their own ideas, forgot all about etiquette and the length of their visit. And as Marion, her heart smitten with a sudden love for old Mr. Asheton, as reminding her of the dearest, fondest grandfather, allowed this feeling to emanate from her eyes and play round her mouth, Mr. Asheton fairly forgot himself.

"Pray, my dear Mrs. Asheton," said he, taking Marion's little hands in his, and

drawing her towards his wife, "cannot you persuade this dear, pretty—I mean, would you ask Mrs. Flower to name an early day, waving ceremony, and come and dine with us?—Will you come, my dear young lady?"

Old men, when they see extreme youth and prettiness, are apt to worship them then and there. It may be that they behold once more the images of their earliest youth, or perhaps feel that they are about to leave such lovely visions for ever.

"My dear Mr. Asheton," said his lady in high stateliness, "I will write to Mrs. Flower. I could not think of such informality."

"Oh! pray don't; the letter might get lost; and, besides, I should have to answer it. Most happy to accept at once, I assure you, any day, all the same, I am sure."

So it was settled for that day week.

As they went home together in their

chariot, a touch of genuine nature rose to Mrs. Asheton's eyes.

"If she should prove all we could wish, my dear husband?"

"She will, she will—the lovely little thing."

As for Mr. Godfrey Asheton, though he had conversed the whole time with Miss Beatrice, and not addressed one syllable to Miss Flower, he thought he should not dislike helping Prissy again in a difficulty.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH SOME OF THE PUPPETS BEGIN TO SHOW THEY HAVE STRONGER FRAMES THAN OTHERS, BETOKENING HARD AND UNPLEASANT WORK.

ERE the Asheton Court party had reached their home, some three miles inland, Mrs. Flower was stumping about the village in her laced boots, Marion and Prissy had returned to their pigeons, and Beatrice sat brooding.

Inheriting her mother's character, the jealousy prominent in it, alone told Beatrice that this visit of the Ashetons, out of

their usual course, had a purpose in it. And she read as clearly as if she saw into their hearts, what was passing in each. They came to see Marion, and for nothing else. In addition to this fact, Mr. Godfrey Asheton's accidental encounter with the girls the day before, was the reason they wished to see her. Now, of all the people who ever visited Asheton Court, none had ever penetrated so far into the arena of its exclusiveness, as Beatrice. She was handsome, agreeable, and accomplished, therefore not only always an acceptable guest, but a very necessary ingredient at the Asheton Court parties, where it need hardly be said dullness and ceremony waited as handmaids upon every guest.

By very imperceptible degrees, she had won her way up to a considerable perch in Mrs. Asheton's favour, prudently eschewing all attempts on Godfrey's, and by this wise

conduct, she had indeed "great method in her madness," when she thought it would be her own fault if she did not succeed in becoming Mrs. Asheton the second. No other young lady, far or near, had such a favourable position, or brought such powerful claims for their consideration, and, as remarked before, it did seem very strange that Mr. Godfrey had not already succumbed. We fear the demur had something to do with the worthy but insufferable step-mama, or the disproportionate hands and feet, or probably most true of all, that she would be there ready, even at the last moment, if none other better than she came within the vista of their horizon, to accept that gift of incalculable value, Mr. Godfrey Asheton's hand. Nobody could swear as to his heart, because it was a maxim of the family, to love according to the manner in which the object of it succumbed and bent

to Ashetons' likes and dislikes, and therefore a heart was an unnecessary appendage in their love affairs.

And now, behold, a vision had risen up, —an object had presented itself, so immediately remarked and sought after, that they had absolutely broken through their own stately rules and whims, to pursue it. Bitterly did Beatrice allow to herself, that this very act showed how desperately anxious they were becoming to attain the object of their wishes; and how nearly the prize was within her own grasp. Disliking the little stranger before, not only because she was of a nature wholly unsuited to her own, but she displaced her from a fancied pedestal of rank, as elder maiden, though not in years, of the family, she now felt justified in hating her.

After satisfying herself during their visit that she was right in her suspicions, she in-

stantly acted upon the defensive. But, alas! as she thought over the expression of Mr. Godfrey Asheton's countenance, when she told him how young, childish, uneducated, was her little cousin, undoubtedly he seemed rather pleased than otherwise, and in endeavouring to decipher the reason of this pleasure, she obtained a clue to her own want of success. Of course, her young cousin having no character of her own, he could the more readily mould her to suit his; undoubtedly, knowing so little, she would the more easily learn nothing but what he would wish, whereas Beatrice was ready-made to his hand.

The result of Miss Beatrice Flower's meditations was very unpleasant. She felt convinced the mischief was done; she was powerless to prevent it, and yet she determined to do it, or die; and, as the commencement of her plans, sat down and

wrote a long letter, evidently intended for "foreign parts."

The reader will think she was vexing herself very unnecessarily—and so do I. For there has as yet appeared nothing to make Mr. Godfrey Asheton remarked as likely to be a desirable or an affectionate husband.

The ancient and noble family of "Ramiano," from whom the mother of Beatrice was descended, did not think the connexionship with a plain English family at all incompatible with their high blood. For that, through successive generations, had become rather poor. On the contrary, they set a full value upon the (to them) incalculable advantages of a comfortable English home, and a certain yearly income in the safe English funds. They had, therefore, always kept up an affectionate intercourse with their (so short time) son-in-law, Mr. Flower, besides having to reside with them one

year in every three—the little Beatrice. On her journeys to and fro, Beatrice was generally accompanied by some one of her Italian relatives, who gladly seized every opportunity of judging for themselves how good "roast beef" is. Among the number was her cousin, Count Giulio, or, as his English connexions named him, Julian de Ramiano, and now the head of the house. He loved England, England's ways, and, above all, English girls, to "an adoration." Among a family remarkable for beauty, he ranked pre-eminent; and having travelled much, besides living half his time in England, his mind was more enlarged than was usual among his countrymen. The letter of Beatrice, when finished, bore his name and direction.

Meantime our story lags.

During that week intervening between the visit and the dinner, besides the return

visit being made, Mr. Godfrey Asheton had contrived (that is, he considered it pure accident) to meet the Misses Flower several times, and also (we presume accidentally) he always joined them. Thus, he was becoming more intimate with Marion; out of this intimacy he gathered that she was indifferent to dress and appearance, which troubled him.

Suppose she should come to dinner inappropriately dressed, over-dressed, or childishly, or unbecomingly dressed. He could not discover that she ever thought seriously on the matter, and of course there were other people asked to the dinner. He worried himself with the notion, just as if he had already asked her to be his wife, she had consented, and he was to introduce her as his intended bride; whereas, clearly at present, he had no sort of business to discompose himself about it.

Fortunately (for him, as he would not have enjoyed his evening; we can scarcely yet say, for her) she was prettily dressed. Still in Indian muslin, spotted with white spots. Some natural ivy placed in her hair, nothing out of the common, nothing peculiar, but her own beaming countenance. Whereas Beatrice looked beautiful, her dress, a miracle of success, consisting, as the gentleman spectators thought (the ladies knew it was only tulle), of clouds of fine lace. They (the ladies) thought it an absurd dress for a dinner party, but, in fact, it was in very good taste, because it was perfectly simple, adorned with nothing but a few natural roses in her hair, and on her bosom. As for Prissy, she had evidently been the object of somebody's kind taste. She sat, consciously blushing out the fact that she looked very nice, and was more than tidily dressed. No pins showed themselves any-

where, her chemisette was not high over one shoulder and utterly lost to sight on the other. She had gloves to match, and a pocket-handkerchief bordered with lace. It was a notion of Prissy's, that if your pocket-handkerchief was clean, what mattered it if it was one of the old common set for everyday use? But, above all, she had the prettiest wreath of real fern on her head that ever was seen, made so artistically, placed so becomingly, and looking so fresh, that she was complimented on all sides.

"Oh! but I didn't—it was'nt me—May did it all; and there wasn't time to do two, or fern enough, or we should both have been alike."

"Then remember, my dear Miss Priscilla," said old Mr. Asheton, "always to send here for as much fern as you like; I place it all at your disposal."

"Thank you; how nice," answered Prissy.

Godfrey looked at his father with much approbation; and altogether he was highly satisfied at the appearance of all the Flower party. Mr. Flower was always exceedingly pleasant to look at—so fresh, handsome, and *débonnaire*. Moreover, he was animated this evening, as if he meant to talk and make himself agreeable. In fact, a dinner party was his one pleasure; excellent as his Sophy was, she was rather too easy tempered to have very good servants. If they came to her perfect in their kind, they were sure to deteriorate; therefore, he seldom had a good, tidy, or well-served dinner at home. Consequently, he enjoyed them all the more abroad. Mrs. Flower also looked less objectionable than usual. Beatrice knew the value of making the best of her, and so had superintended her toilet.

Added to which, Betty James's husband had never turned up, and she was so occupied in thinking of the best means to discover the truant, picturing to herself the delight of restoring and reconciling them to each other (her favourite amusement), that really, to use her own expression in conjugal talk behind the matrimonial curtains that night, "she had not a word to throw at a dog."

Marion had but one gift, for accomplishment it could not be termed, as she was not taught it. The power to warble forth little musical gushes of strange eirie-like melodies. But as this could not be called into action at a dinner-party, of course her possession of it was unknown, and Beatrice's beautiful voice and excellent performance, as usual, entertained the company. It was then, at that moment, for the first and last time, that Godfrey drew a comparison

between the cousins, and wavered in his decision. Unlucky Beatrice! as she sang, flushed with excitement and the rapturous applause, she opened her mouth too widely to please him. Down she went, below zero, in the thermometer of Godfrey's heart. She might sing like Grisi—Jenny Lind — better than either—yet if it was necessary to put on a temporary resemblance to a frog, every time she sang, she should never sing herself into becoming Mrs. Godfrey Asheton.

He turned to the other, as if to tender his undivided homage, and again, unluckily for Beatrice, was confirmed in his choice by the picture that presented itself to him.

His father was speaking to Marion, who stood with shy, yet happy look, listening, her attitude the prettiest conceivable, the little head just bent forward, one long curl

having escaped from the wreath of ivy that kept it within bounds. Godfrey mentally settled that some time or other he would have a statue made exactly in that attitude.

Mr. and Mrs. Asheton permitted themselves that evening to open their hearts to each other unreservedly.

"My dear wife, will you forgive your old husband losing his heart to that little lovely maiden, so innocent in her simplicity, yet so wise in pretty ways?"

"My dear Mr. Asheton, forgive you! Indeed, I should be tempted to upbraid you, had it been otherwise. I know not what charm there is about her — she is certainly not so beautiful as Beatrice, but she has a manner so refined, yet so bewitching, that if indeed I have her not for my daughter, I shall be sadly disappointed for my own sake."

"I doubt it not, my love; there is a grace in all she does. Did you notice our son?"

"Yes, I did, indeed, I never saw him before regard any girl so intently."

"He told me, when out riding to-day, that her cousin had informed him she was totally uneducated, could barely read and write, had been brought up in Barracks all her life, and scarcely knew the common courtesies of society."

"You amaze me, Mr. Asheton; surely it is not true; did Godfrey remark upon such information?"

"Yes; he said, 'that if, under so many disadvantages, she was so superior to most of the young ladies he knew, what might she not become in good society?'"

"Perfectly true; a most just remark on the part of Godfrey. I have but one wish now, that Ellinor would see her. Her ex-

cellent judgment would at once decide me."

"Ah, my dear wife, we have waited so long for this happy chance, let us leave Godfrey to his own free decision. If he chooses this fair little thing, I shall not find it in my heart to allow anyone to make the least objection."

Though Godfrey was an only son, he was not an only child. He had two sisters, both older than himself, and both married. How it came to pass that the daughters of the family were so much more easily mated than the son, may, perhaps, be explained by the fact that they could be sought, whereas it was their brother's duty to go and seek, which we have already intimated he would not do.

They were handsome women, and being well portioned, were not likely to remain unsought. And Cecilia, the eldest, was

by a freak of fortune the possessor of an estate, under certain conditions.

A maternal ancestor marrying into their family, not wishing his estates and name to be swallowed up in that of the Ashetons, had willed both to be borne always by the second son of the then reigning Mr. Asheton. Failing a second son, the eldest daughter was to stand in the place of one, and enjoy the estates, without adopting the name. She had power to make a settlement on it for another life, either husband or child, as she pleased. But in defiance of all settlements, all wills, nay, actual enjoyment of the estates, the moment a second son was born, she ceased to be the possessor, as much as if death had intervened between her and them. A certain Sir Robert Fane, a true follower of the world, and devotee to race-courses, a well known man on the turf, had not

been able to pursue these pleasures without considerably diminishing his patrimony. Now that he was older, wiser, and more experienced, he could enjoy all the excitement of this sort of life without paying so dearly for it. Yet, it was necessary for him to make a good marriage, in order to keep it up at all. The terms on which the eldest Miss Asheton enjoyed a fortune of 4,000*l.* a year rather took his fancy. It was so like a racing speculation, as to the length of time she might enjoy it; he quite loved her for the excitement it gave him. And, indeed, it is supposed that he attempted to make a good book in betting on the *pros* and *cons.* Perhaps, he might not have entered so speedily into a courtship for the heiress, if he had not dived pretty deeply into his intended brother-in-law's feelings, and could guess even better than

Godfrey himself, that his extreme fastidiousness would keep him unwedded a number of years.

That one so unsuited in every way should have gained admittance as a lover into the exclusive house of Asheton may excite surprise. But Sir Robert was a perfect gentleman, indeed, a courtier in his way, which is often the case with the wicked ones of the world. Besides, the poor Ashetons were utterly ignorant of the sort of world he lived in. He was eminently agreeable and clever, seemed on familiar terms with a duke, a marquis, two or three earls, and a host of titled people. It reached even Asheton Court that a Lady Somebody Something had died of love for him. Though people acquainted with Lady Somethings know that they are just as silly, and die just as foolishly of love, as plain Miss Nobodies. He

gained his point, and married Miss Asheton, and they were a very happy couple.. She was gentle and sweet-tempered, highly charmed that Sir Robert always appeared so truly sensible of his good fortune in gaining an Asheton, while he willingly pandered to this little weakness, in return for the means she had brought him for indulging his whims. That his real character was not even discovered by the Ashetons may be partly accounted for by the fact that your true man of the world always accommodates himself to the company he is in. With the Ashetons he was an agreeable, lively Asheton, always most welcomed, always greatly missed and regretted. But, to say truth, he did not trouble them with much of his company. Important business with the duke, pressing letters from the earl, a summons down to Sir Harry's, sounded very well and proper, and he

echoed his wife's gentle "how tiresome," with "yes," "terrible bore," and went.

They had one boy, the spoiling of whom was his mother's sole employment and amusement. She had never been strong since his birth. But as long as there was no second son at Asheton Court, Sir Robert did not disquiet himself much. He had a reversionary interest.

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW PUPPET, WHO PERFORMS THE PART OF LADY MACBETH ON THE SHORTEST NOTICE.

How Mr. Trevor ever crossed Mrs. Trevor's path is unknown even to himself. Fate accomplished it. Miss Ellinor Asheton being neither the son and heir, nor the daughter and heiress, was, between them, likely to have passed for a mere nobody, but for her own individual character and energy. If she had been born Cecilia, she would have acted like Cecilia, and rested quiet

under her position as an heiress. If she had been Godfrey, she would have done the same, but being neither, she must distinguish herself in the family circle. From her earliest childhood she reasoned and argued, no matter about what, until she had fairly established for herself the character of being remarkably clever. This the family not only gladly allowed, but greatly prided themselves upon. As long as she remained at home, nobody gave an opinion until Ellinor had spoken hers. All plans were organised and settled by her. She ruled the whole house. She had certainly sufficient wit always to make her opinions coincide with her brother's, and managed so adroitly as to make his always appear to be exactly the counterpart of hers. And it must be allowed that Godfrey, not having much to love, poured out, of the supply of affections bestowed on him at his birth, the larger half on his sister Ellinor.

As Sir Robert was successful in making the Ashetons believe he was one of themselves in opinions as well as actions, so was Ellinor equally happy in her endeavours to be considered the "clever" one in the family. It was a case of "gullism" in both parties, with this difference, Sir Robert "gulled" designedly, Mrs. Trevor "gulled" herself as well as the others; she was not clever enough to discover that, departing from the dull, but truly refined, character of the Ashetons, she, in reality, was nothing more than another sort of Mrs. Flower, without her good temper.

Mr. Trevor was a tall, pale, aristocratic-looking man, with a small estate in Cornwall, that was all one vast mine. Therefore he ranked among men as the owner and squire of half a county. He had one defect in person, namely his legs, which were weak, and imparted a sort of dôubt-

ful, deprecatory look to his whole person. And he had one mental imperfection—he was hopelessly dull. If he ever gave himself the trouble of thinking up an idea, and the still greater trouble of enunciating it, it was generally most inappropriate, or singularly ill-timed.

It is supposed, with much foundation of truth, that Miss Asheton proposed to him, for the following reason:—Notwithstanding his wealth and gentlemanly appearance, Mr. Trevor was so intolerably stupid, he was shunned and avoided as something too heavy for the strongest-minded to take in hand. Now this was just a case wherein Miss Asheton could show forth to the world her superior intelligence. She pronounced him a clever man, in defiance of all the world; in fact, so clever, that it was no surprise to her that the world could not understand him. The generality of the world did not

understand her. But she could talk to Mr. Trevor. Nobody denied this, for all she required was a good listener. There are several species of good talkers in the world. Those who are eloquent, those who are witty, those who are earnest, but the largest proportion belong to those who are good listeners. For though they do not talk, they gain the credit of it. People are always so pleased to be able to say all their say out, that they willingly give credit to the listener for having been "most agreeable and entertaining."

So that, by degrees, Mr. Trevor really suited Miss Ellinor Asheton. At all events, having declared herself his champion, she could do no less than prove her words by her deeds. But as to which of them proposed, history is silent. It is probable, knowing Mr. Trevor's habits, he might have inferred the wish. But they married, there was no

doubt about that, and were the happy parents of two little slim girls, pale and meek, who were being brought up by their excellent and clever mamma on the homœopathic system, both as regarded food, physic, and clothing. Therefore all the winter through, they were little patient sufferers from chilblains, and all the summer they were victims to a perpetual avoidance of sunshine and fresh air. For that great blazing, brazen disrespecter of persons, the sun, tanned and freckled the little white Miss Trevors with as impudent a touch as if they had been common maidens. Winter and summer, the little Miss Trevors gave one the idea of being thoroughly chilled through, and it became a sort of irresistible madness, the desire to present them with a hot cup of tea, just to see the effect it would have upon them.

Ellinor's marriage was a great blow to Godfrey; but having given him to under-

stand it was quite a duty on her part, he admired and loved her all the more, consulted her as much as heretofore, spent a great part of his time with her, and began to think with her that Mr. Trevor was a clever man. Silence is one of the greatest marks of wisdom. No wonder, therefore, that Mr. Trevor's reputation rose.

Ellinor was more in Godfrey's confidence than any other person. To her he had confided how unutterably disagreeable it was to him, the idea of matrimony, and yet at the same time how peremptory was the necessity, having no brother. Pitying his very proper and truly just feelings upon such a subject, Ellinor suggested that he might make an eldest son of her and her children, answering for it on the spot that Mr. Trevor would only too gladly exchange his ancient name for one so honoured as Asheton. Godfrey

thanked her warmly for the generous sacrifice she would make, but hinted how earnestly his father and mother desired his marriage, and how lonely the Court was now without either her or Cecilia. She hinted, in return, that there was nothing to prevent the Trevors taking up their abode altogether with the Ashetons. But apparently he heeded not this further sacrifice. Nevertheless, from this conversation the thought arose in Mrs. Trevor's mind, that the injustice of her being nothing peculiar at her birth in the family, would eventually be atoned for. She would become Mrs. Trevor Asheton, of Asheton Court. And this idea strengthened itself every time she thought of it, until, after the manner of weak brains, it became a settled fact. It will now be seen that, desirable as it was, Mr. Godfrey Asheton should marry; nervously anxious as his parents were to forward all schemes to that

effect, there were no less than three parties who would think themselves grievously outraged if he did so.

Miss Beatrice Flower, because he would probably marry the wrong person.

Sir Robert Fane, lest a second son should be born.

Mrs. Trevor, because where would be Mrs. Trevor Asheton?

According to the laws of Ashetons, it was a high crime, worthy of the only great law they had in their own hands, namely, "instant dismissal," if any of their servants proved guilty of gossip.

Thus matters were going on, in an affair of such vast importance, and not a word was buzzed about it in any quarter. Mr. Godfrey Asheton rode, and walked, and talked, and studied botany with all three Miss Flowers, and rumour was silent.

The more he saw of the little unsophisti-

cated, artless Marion, the more he decided she should have the privilege of the "throwing of his matrimonial handkerchief." But there was clearly no hurry about it. No one was likely to be coming, wooing that way, and even if they did, what chance had they against Mr. Godfrey Asheton?—this idea though gave him an ugly twinge. He was not to be put into the list against any other mortal — that would destroy every pleasure in the matter. But it was not likely, she was so young, utterly unconscious of lovers, or her own attractions, and he must wait until September, when, according to annual custom, the Trevors would be at Asheton Court. Ellinor must see Marion before he proposed—he must have her approbation ere he took the final leap.

These were his thoughts, as, apparently negligent of there being any other inhabitant

of the world than himself, he was leisurely parading up and down a small modicum of sand, that the sea was complacently leaving, for, apparently, his sole benefit. He persuaded himself this was always the soonest dry, and the firmest piece on the sea-shore, when the tide was receding; also it commanded the cliffs, down which a rocky path led from the Wood-head to the sea. There, if anyone was inclined for a walk at Wood-head, they must come by this path to the village, or the sea. If to the former, they passed by the upper way; if to the latter, the road lay straight to that particular piece of dry firm sand.

He was aware they would now be coming soon. The wild pigeons had been to pay their court to their pretty little tamer, and were wheeling home in various flocks. After the third turn to and fro, he descried them coming down. As they

approached, taking the lower path, he discerned four figures instead of three, and one was a male, Mr. Flower probably.

On the contrary, it proved improbably. Mr. Flower's large and portly frame, with measured stately step, was very unlike the lithe, slight, and active figure, the springing step of their companion.

"The count," exclaimed Godfrey, as they approached nearer. "When could he have arrived?"

And a remembrance of his great personal beauty would flit across his brain, liked he it or not.

It was the Count di Ramiano, who greeted Mr. Asheton with all the fervour of his race, in the prettiest broken English, and with a face and figure that Godfrey allowed at once, were handsomer than ever.

"Oh! he was in such exties to arrive at England; it was as so much beautiful

as ever it was, but that it was not of reason of him to think beauty of the country, when he was in presence of such much more beauty of the signorinas," and he bowed to Marion in the most marked way, who only just saved Godfrey from a fit of utter disgust by not appearing to regard what the count was saying. In truth, Marion's life had been so full of real startling events, that the rhapsodies and flights of romantic natures were not understood by her.

"Have you been here long?" asked Godfrey.

"I arrive at three days long. I pay my respects to the Signora Asheton, now, presto, for my mail, le mie robe were loosed, I get them but this day; I not be seen in my costume of travel; I keep profound my arrive to all but my dear amicos at the Woodlow."

Beatrice's quick woman's wit had devised a most excellent scheme to stay the intended wooing of Mr. Asheton for her little cousin.

From her knowledge of the excitable nature of the young count, she knew he could not be twenty-four hours in the company of Marion without being violently in love with her. She was just the style of beauty he most admired, and he had been confiding to Beatrice that morning that he had never realised what angels could be like, until he had seen that Signorina bellissima, Marion. Being extremely demonstrative, he had already amazed Marion, if not alarmed her, by a vehemence of admiration she neither liked nor could appreciate, and which she would have repelled, but for a remark of Prissy's.

"O, never mind what Julian says; he was once in love with me, when there

was nobody here but me and the cat. He's just foolish, you know, that's all."

But Beatrice saw with a secret pleasure that coloured her cheeks and brightened her eyes, how on the instant the sensitive nature of Godfrey Asheton took the alarm. The count discovered his feelings in every word he spoke—in every gesture. He coloured if Marion's dress touched him, he gazed in rapture if she spoke to him, he saw nothing but her. Even Beatrice, accustomed to his enamoured fits, had never seen him so completely absorbed.

By degrees Godfrey's manner grew colder and more distant. Beatrice had placed herself by his side, the others walking behind with the count. Ever and anon she saw Mr. Asheton glance behind; each time his look became more stern, and finally, as Marion's soft laugh came fluttering by his ear, he abruptly wished Beatrice good morning,

scarcely doing more than raise his hat to the others as he departed. For a week he sulked, and nothing but the evident anxiety of his father and mother roused him at last to a demeanour more becoming an Asheton. They had not, however, been privy to his thoughts on the sands, or the shock that so immediate a contradiction to his settled opinion had given him.

Hearing from his father and mother that the two younger girls had been at Asheton Court that day, claiming Mr. Asheton's promise of some ferns, he so far lowered himself in his own estimation as to say:—

"And not accompanied by the count, Miss Flower's *cavaliere servante?*"

"Oh! no, by no means; to tell you the truth, I do not think he is a favourite with them. I gained from Priscilla the reason of their taking this long walk unescorted, was their desire to escape from the count.

Probably he and Beatrice are betrothed, and therefore not such agreeable company as might be."

"Your pardon, dear mother, I was but a short time in their society, one day last week, and Count Julian could see nothing and no one but Marion."

A thrill of pleasure shot through the hearts of both parents, and made them turn their eyes in almost undisguised delight upon each other. The obdurate (though not too much so, considering) heart of their Godfrey was touched, and the slightest possible degree of vexation was in his voice, and never before had he ever called any woman by her Christian name, who was not related to him.

Mr. Asheton. "My dear Godfrey, I never made a bet in my life, or stated anything on the word of another, but that my pretty little May-Flower, as I cannot help calling

her, with her innocent eyes and artless ways, should marry that half-mad young count, never! I have said it, never!! never!!!"

Mrs. Asheton (astonished). "My dear Mr. Asheton, pray, pray, not so loud—you astonish me; I never saw you so excited."

Mr. Asheton, (unheeding his wife). "Godfrey, you should have seen her to-day, running about the conservatory like a bird, picking out all the rare ferns, and telling me their names with that sweet soft voice of hers, and looking up so prettily into my face.

"'My dear young lady,' said I to her, 'you will make me forget my manners, and I shall find myself calling you all sorts of pet names.'

"'Ah, sir,' said she, 'pray do. I have had no one to call me pet names since I lost my grandfather, and I shall love you just as I did him.'

"And the tears came like large crystal

drops, and I could not but put my hand on her head, and call her 'My little May Flower.' Then her smiles chased away her tears; and as for marrying Count Julian, never! never!"

Mrs. Asheton. "I agree with your father, Godfrey. Her manners to-day were as free from anything like a love affair as mine might be. She played with my white kittens as any child might do. She made old Turk follow her about as if he had known her all his life, and she coaxed your chestnut mare, Bessie, not only to eat out of her hand, but to let her fondle the little colt. I never saw anyone so fond of animals, or so fearless. I sent them home in the carriage, they remained so long, for we were as reluctant to part with them as they were to go. If Priscilla did not resemble Mrs. Flower, I think I should like her. She is so very honest and downright."

Godfrey. "I will call to-morrow on the count; I ought to have done it before. 'Tis useless asking him to come here for a day's shooting, these foreigners are so ignorant of real sport, and a day on the moors would probably lay him up for a week."

Godfrey made up his mind that night that he would allow the young count a free course. If Marion accepted him, there was an end of the matter; it would not take him as many days to forget her, as he had already been weeks in thinking about her.

If she did not accept him, why, then, he must confess she lost nothing in his favour, but rather gained. It was not every girl, young as Marion, brought up so carelessly, with no one to love but a cousin Prissy, and nothing to pet but pigeons, who could refuse to be the idol and loadstar of a youth, handsome as imagination (which is a wonderful artist) could paint, and who

would make her from a little nobody, an orphan and homeless, into a countess. On the morrow he thought still more strongly on the subject, and went in amiable and pleasant mood to call upon Count Julian.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH A PROPOSAL IS INTENDED, AND ANOTHER PROPOSAL MADE.

As Mr. Godfrey Asheton leisurely walked up the cliff path to the Wood-head, he became aware of a figure on a dangerous point of the cliff, gesticulating, and throwing himself about in an alarming manner. Feeling uncertain as to the sanity of the individual, Mr. Asheton dropped his leisurely step, and was up the steep cliff, and down

upon the unfortunate, before many people would have decided what to do.

To his surprise, this supposed maniac proved to be the very person upon whom he was about to call. At first the count was enraged at this intrusion; then he changed like a flash of lightning, and burst into a flood of tears. Finally, he embraced Mr. Asheton fervently, spite of all his efforts; and making him sit down by him, declared he was, of all people far and near, the one he prayed of the good God to see. "He was in *miséréré*, in fires, in groans, in much great trouble. If the good Asheton would advise of him, he would be his *servante*, his devoted. He was scorched with his pain of heart, and if it burnt more, there would be of him—nothing!"

Godfrey promised his best, and, as a preliminary, listened for a length of time to rhapsodies that could not fail to be ridicu-

lous to the common sense of an English gentleman, even if they had not been equally absurd from the count's feelings, obscuring what he did know of the English language. The substance of it all amounted to nothing more than that he was madly in love with "La bellissima Marion," "Mariana mia," as he said, with an expression and pathos that really touched Godfrey, though he winced at it.

"Mariana mia!" wherefore, then, this exhibition of misery?

"Ah, perche, questo è il perche, Mr. Asheton. I not ask her, I try, I supplica, that is my reason, can you not see? I mad, I have this scorch in my heart, for she smile, she not care, she not give a moment of space of time to say one word."

"Oh, you wish to propose to her, and she has not yet given you the opportunity."

Count Julian embraced Godfrey so suddenly, as a mark of joy at being at last understood, that he had not time to escape it. But to avoid a repetition, he removed some little space from him.

"It is quite impossible that I can assist you. If the young lady will not give you the opportunity, I do not see how I am to interfere."

"Ah, ah!" began the count, his whole frame convulsed with a sudden passion, and throwing himself upon Godfrey with the wildest rage, "you love her; you die."

Fortunately Godfrey's strong frame and active habits made him much more than a match for a youth so slight as the count, though his excited passion gave him a temporary strength.

It took but a few moments, not only to render him powerless, but to bear him some distance from the conspicuous and

dangerous spot on which this conference had been held.

As Mr. Asheton threw down his burden on the greensward that formed part of a broad terrace, still panting with his exertions, and flushed with anger, he said,

"Give me your reason for such an assertion?"

Sullen and discomforted, the count uttered but one word in answer, "Beatrice."

"Excuse me," answered Godfrey haughtily, "I place that faith in your cousin, as a woman and a lady, she could not have asserted what she never heard from me. Go, sir, as a man of honour, to the young lady's uncle and protector, which you should have done before, considering her youth and innocence. Go; it will be time enough for me to express my feelings towards her, when you have had her answer." And so saying, he stalked away

on the highest stilts of indignation, hardly knowing what made him so—whether the folly of the youth, the discovery of his secret, or the unkindness of Fate dragging him, Mr. Godfrey Asheton, into a ridiculous quarrel about a young lady he had barely known two months. But his adventures were not yet over.

He was fuming still, having scarcely got as far as the Asheton grounds, to which there was a path running from the sea, up a secluded little dingle that shortened the distance almost half, when he heard sobs, and looking before him, seated on one of the numerous little rustic seats that were scattered along the pathway, he recognised Miss Priscilla Flower. It was quite impossible now to escape her notice, and equally impossible that he should see her in such distress, and not tender his services.

At first his polite offers only caused fresh tears.

"My mother—could my mother be of any assistance?"

"Well, I don't know; perhaps she might. It's all Julian's fault."

"Surely," thought Mr. Asheton, "she is not in love with the count."

Prissy, having found her tongue, proceeded pretty glibly—

"He is,—yes, he is, nothing but a fellow."

To Prissy's innocent mind, this was the very worst character she could give him; but Mr. Asheton, not knowing that her vocabulary of vituperative epithets was limited, did not understand the intense degradation she thus heaped upon the count.

"He's breaking my heart, that he is."

Mr. Asheton was ready to laugh aloud

in very scorn, at the position he was in. The confidante of Miss Prissy Flower in a disappointed love affair!

"I am afraid I can be of little use."

"Perhaps Mrs. Asheton would hide May for a little in that big house.

"May—Marion, you mean—Miss Flower," and Godfrey sat down beside her, determined patiently to hear the whole affair.

"Yes, he'll never find her there. She says she will go away if that fellow bothers her so; she will leave me, and I love her so much. And it is so wicked of him, because he knows she has nowhere to go. Her sister could not keep her any longer, though she loves her dearly. You should see her letters;—I think, only May won't let me say such a thing, it is all owing to Sir Alan. Men are so disagreeable—are they not, Mr. Asheton? See this horrid Julian—but I'm never going to call

him Julian again. He isn't really any cousin of mine or May's, that we are to care for him—a fellow!"

Here the pause occasioned by the emphasis Prissy used in this word, enabled Mr. Asheton to put in a question.

"The count annoys Miss Flower, then?"

"To be sure he does; and who wouldn't be annoyed? doing such a ridiculous thing as asking her to marry him only a week after he saw her, and then going half mad because she refused him. And then, is it what a gentleman should do, I should like to know, asking her again and again, and me there, as if people that were real lovers ever proposed when anyone else was by? Such a fellow! Only, to be sure, he could not have spoken to her at all, for she wouldn't be alone, trust her for that."

"I have just parted from the count;

he asked my advice regarding an intended proposal to Miss Flower, but never allowed he had done it."

"Done it, he's always doing it, and Beatrice encourages him, and mamma does, and papa can't be interrupted in his sermon, and Marion says she will go away, and that's why I am crying. Marion has just run up to see the old woman of the lodge, and I was keeping watch lest he should follow us, and I was to whistle to warn her; and just after she was gone I recollected that I could not whistle, and I thought, if he was to come, what should we do, and that put me upon thinking more, and how if she was to leave us; and then I heard steps, and I was ready to scream, but it was you, and to think of my being in such misery, all through such a fellow."

"Then, my dear Miss Priscilla, dry your eyes and grieve no more. I will beg my

mother to call upon Mrs. Flower to-morrow, and ask the favour of yours and Miss Flower's company for a few days, or until the count returns to his own country."

"Oh! how good you are, and so kind. Nobody shall ever dare to say to me again that you are proud and disagreeable. See, here is May coming; now does she not look pretty?"

Mr. Asheton was glad of anything to divert his companion from seeing the surprise, not to say annoyance, which her naïve confessions had excited in his countenance, and he could heartily respond to her last remark. They saw her coming leisurely through the trees, a basket in one hand, and her hat in the other. She was flushed, for the air in that narrow, densely-wooded dingle was hot. She swayed her hat to and fro to the tune of an Indian

melody she was singing, and the slight disorder of her curls but added to her beauty, even in Godfrey's eyes. Suddenly she stopped both singing and walking, and stooped down.

"Now, that's to save some poor worm or beetle," whisperedt he delighted Prissy; "she does not mind one bit touching those nasty creatures, if they are in danger of being trodden upon."

"Do not tell her of our little scheme, if you can help it," whispered he also, hurriedly.

"No, that I won't; perhaps she wouldn't come, you know."

Godfrey felt that Prissy's powers of keeping a secret were very small, but, fortified by this idea, there might be some chance. If circumstances had not already made Marion such an object of interest to Mr. Asheton, she would have become so now, from her manner as she met him.

He concluded, from all he had heard, that she would of course be somewhat confused, not to say nervous, or shyly abashed—he could not say why he thought so. But he would forgive her, she was so young. There was no necessity for any forgiveness or thought on the matter. She was her natural self. As far as she was concerned, the count was a myth. Godfrey saw them safe into their own house, and coming home, made up his mind to do one thing that very evening.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH THE PROPOSAL IS ACCEPTED, BUT NOT BY THE RIGHT PARTY.

Scene.—AFTER DINNER AT ASHETON COURT.
Dramatis Personæ.—MR. AND MRS. ASHETON, AND MR. GODFREY ASHETON.

Godfrey. "My dearest mother, my kind father, in asking of you both a boon—an inestimable one—I am that fortunate son who knows beforehand he cannot demand of such parents a favour they might hesitate to accord him; because, emulating

their example, he will ask nothing but what they themselves desire;—I demand your consent to my marriage.

Mr. Asheton. "My little May-Flower!"

Mrs. Asheton. "That sweet Marion!"

Godfrey. "Even so."

Here Mr. and Mrs. Asheton, regardless of their dignity, their exclusiveness, their freedom from all human weaknesses, fell into each other's arms, weeping, embracing, and blessing themselves, all for very joy: totally oblivious that many a Mr. and Mrs. Snooks in the world would act, and had acted, in no other way.

They then embraced their son with so much tearful joy, so many protestations of delight, such thanks and congratulations, that it might have been supposed Mr. Godfrey Asheton had given up the only female he ever could have loved, to marry another of their particular choice. If ever

an unselfish, tender emotion entered Godfrey's heart, it was at that moment, for, touched by the natural and over-flowing joy of his parents, a sight most unusual in Asheton conclave, he mentally resolved the first lesson he would teach his Marion would be to love and honour them.

Mr. Asheton. "My dear, dear son, methought only the other day how dull the house looked, when her bright face left it. And she plays at backgammon, too; she did so always with that fine old soldier, her grandfather, the General."

Mrs. Asheton. "And with all her attractions we have the satisfaction of knowing her family is almost as old as our own, besides being limited. I consider it a great advantage that she stands almost alone, with no tribes of brothers or sisters."

Godfrey. "Pardon me, she has one sister, married to Sir Alan Gordon. You remember,

perhaps, my dear mother, the sensation a Miss Flower created one season in London, by her beauty and manners."

Mrs. Asheton. "And did you know her, Godfrey? Perhaps she was superior—"

Mr. Asheton (hastily.) "That she could not be."

Godfrey. "At all events, she was much more fortunate in her education. She was sent from India as a child, and brought up by Mrs. Aubrey, in as favoured and happy a manner as my own sisters."

Mrs. Asheton. "I would you had seen her, Godfrey."

Godfrey. "Not so, mother; I prefer my little wild maiden. Lady Gordon, from all accounts, might have had, and would be justified to have, fixed tastes and opinions, that, unobjectionable to most persons, yet altogether would not have suited the spoilt son you have rendered so difficult to

please. Now, Marion we can mould to be an Asheton, heart and soul, or I am very much mistaken."

Mr. Asheton. "Don't let her alter; I will not have her changed, my innocent little May-Flower. And now, my son, about settlements. In all things, as if you had no father, please yourself. It is the least I can do towards one who never caused his parents a pang."

Godfrey. "My dearest, most honoured father, do not overwhelm me too much. What debts of gratitude do I not already owe you?"

Mr. Asheton. "You have repaid all, you owe me nothing, giving me such a daughter. As my father did by me, so will I do by you, and your loved mother's settlement shall be the pattern of your wife's."

Godfrey. "Nothing could please me better, I return you most grateful thanks.

But in one thing I would have them altered. My mother has spoilt me; I could not hope to gain for my wife, one in whom you could place such unutterable confidence, as you were able to do in her. I would wish, in case of disagreement, untoward circumstances, a disappointment in her character (we have known her so short a time), that even before my death, I might have power to accord my wife her widow's dower, on removing myself from her society."

Mrs. Asheton (astonished). "How, my son?"

Godfrey. "Mother, I cannot marry, feeling myself bound to remain and live with a person who might outrage my sensitiveness in a thousand unforseen ways. I must have the power to free myself, and yet not be unjust."

Mrs. Asheton. "But your marriage vows? —the pledge you give."

Godfrey. "Are doubtless stringent. But that peculiar fastidiousness of the Asheton family which I inherit—I fear I must say to an unfortunate degree—renders such a clause necessary, for my perfect content."

Mr. Asheton. "Say no more, my dear wife, this is but a bugbear in reality. My sweet May-Flower will be able to laugh with us all, ere many years are over, at our son's apprehensions."

Godfrey. "She shall have equal freedom. I demand it not for myself only."

Mrs. Asheton (wishing to change the subject). "Now, we must write as soon as possible to tell the joyful news. I know not which of your sisters will rejoice the most."

Godfrey. "My dear mother, in deference to you and my father, I have asked your consent first. It would be as well to say nothing to my sisters, until I have gained that of the young lady."

Mr. Asheton. "Oh! my dear son, how much you have disappointed me. You might have known our consent was only too ready. I thought I would go to the Wood-head the earliest moment of propriety, to kiss and welcome her into the family, and to bid her call me grandfather. I seem to long to hear her call me so, since she has talked so much of my old friend, the General. And it will be a more endearing name than papa, will it not, my love?"

Mrs. Asheton. "You are enthusiastic about her, my dear husband, and make me smile; but of course you will ask her to-morrow, Godfrey?"

Godfrey. "I had not intended making known my hopes to her until next month, after Ellinor had seen her. But the mad conduct of that young count, and the extreme stupidity of her relations, have

placed her in a situation that, even if I had no interest in her, would prompt me to do all I could to free her from it.

Godfrey here detailed all the events of the day, winding up with some severe remarks on Count Julian's conduct, in not acknowledging to him that he had already proposed and been refused. And further stating it was his intention to seek him the first thing in the morning, extort the truth from him, and in return confess to him that it was his intention to beseech Miss Flower to accept him as her husband.

"By this means," continued Godfrey, "if she accepts me—"

"Of which there is no doubt," interrupted his mother."

Godfrey, to his honour be it spoken, shook his head, though he smiled. The smile did not express that he would be

refused, but the shake of the head signified that he might have to fight against some girlish scruples.

"If she accepts me, the count has no alternative, he must leave the country, and she will be no longer subjected to his wild wooing. If she does not accept me—"

Mr. Asheton (vehemently). "Then I shall take her under my protection. I constitute myself her grandfather at once."

Godfrey. "Thank you, my dear sir, for I shall tell her of your offer first; then, if I am accepted, I shall know it is wholly for myself, and that I am in the enviable position of successful rival against, I must allow, the handsomest man I ever saw."

The conversation now took a pleasant turn, not to say joyful, and Mr. Godfrey Asheton went to bed that night with quite

a lover-like impatience for the morrow. He longed to see how Marion would look when he asked her to be his wife. He was to go to the Wood-head the first thing after breakfast, and Mrs. Asheton was to follow in the carriage after luncheon, with the double intention of receiving Marion as her daughter, and bringing the two girls home with her.

While matters were so delightfully arranged at Asheton Court, the Wood-head was in a state of extreme discomfort.

Mr. Flower's sermon was completely spoilt, through losing the thread of it no less than three times, the count having burst into his sanctum thus often to pour out his wishes and hopes, and to beseech Mr. Flower's interference. His frantic manner, his absurd jealousy, his feminine beauty, all reminded Mr. Flower so strongly of his one year of misery, that he became

stupefied. The count's passionate appeals opened his eyes and mouth in painful astonishment, but nothing more. And even when Marion ran for refuge to him, he only shook his head, and, as she could perceive, was incapable of affording her the least assistance. Mrs. Flower, between her distress at the spoiling of the sermon, meant on purpose for that "prodigal son" just returned—Betty James's recreant spouse—her sorrow for the misery of that dear Julian, her grief for the vexation of that darling Marion, her desire to do all she could to further the match, according to the advice of Beatrice, and her endeavours to break it all off, in accordance with Prissy's indignant remonstrances, was in a pitiable state.

Beatrice herself was anything but comfortable. She had not calculated upon Marion's having such determination of pur-

pose and decision of character; neither did she imagine her cousin would have permitted his passion to outstep every boundary of sense and courtesy. She had often seen him in love before, but never to the extent he was now, and while she preached patience and time to him as the only means to gain Marion, she could not but wonder that so young a girl should have the firmness to resist such passionate devotion.

While Marion wept tears of indignation at the desolate situation in which she found herself, Prissy wiped them away, vehemently disgusted "that she should shed them for such a fellow."

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH THE PROPOSAL REMAINS STILL UNACCEPTED.

THE morning dawned calmly. The count had made up his mind to appeal once more to Marion, not for any immediate answer, but to give him hopes for the future. The vows he would make to please her, the time he would wait to oblige her, the agony he would endure in silence, to gain her affection at last, were all put into proper English by Beatrice, that they might lose none of their

effect from Marion's ignorance of the Italian language. Mr. Flower gave hopes, if he was left alone, that he might find the thread of his discourse; Mrs. Flower, enchanted to hear this, devoted her energies to keeping guard over him, oblivious of Julian's despair and Beatrice's orders. May and Prissy were discovered to have gone forth very early in the morning, leaving a message that they did not intend to return to breakfast. Fortunately they had made no secret of their plan, otherwise all Count Julian's good resolutions would have been thrown to the winds. Though the servants did not know for what eventual purpose they had engaged old Hugh, the fisherman, to take them across the bay in his boat, they knew that breakfasting with Mrs. Ford, the doctor's wife, was part of the plan; walking home round the bay afterwards, another.

The secret intention of the girls was to ask Mrs. Ford to take Marion into her house and under her care, until the Woodhead was rid of the presence of the count, Prissy remaining rigidly silent regarding the Asheton Court invitation.

Having arranged with Beatrice that she should go to meet them, and under some slight pretence, detach and detain the too faithful Prissy, Julian took up his most impatient watch upon a point of the cliffs, that commanded a full view of the bay, while the confluence of the many pathways, mentioned in this veracious history, met close by.

It was, indeed, no idle or transient love that possessed the poor Julian. He had admired and flirted with many girls, but, though anxious to marry, not one had really excited his feelings to the extent of love.

Now, as if touched by a Promethean flame, the first sight of Marion had, as even in the case of the cold-blooded, haughty Godfrey Asheton, made a lasting impression. Her peculiar girlish beauty, the innocent sweetness as well as frankness of her manners, the grace of every movement, the redundant beauty of her hair, so rich in sunny shades, her girlish gaiety, yet womanly composure, made her altogether the most attractive creature imagination could picture.

Fearful lest his vehemence was the real cause of her evident dislike, Julian spent the tedious time of her coming in schooling his beating heart to the persuasive eloquence his own language could so well express. And ere she reached the spot intended for the rendezvous, unattended by Prissy, he felt he could die at her feet, murmuring out his passionate love in melt-

ing tones, rather than startle her with its violence.

Marion's colour rose, but nothing more, as he stood in the pathway before her.

Dropping on one knee, and clasping her dress, he began his last appeal.

Marion listened as he poured out his whole heart before her, the tones of his voice assuming the melody of music, and his gentleness giving a pathos to all he said, entirely different from his former violence. As he finished by murmuring, if he had not her love, he should die—die—she trembled, it seemed so true.

Some one else trembled also, who had arrived, at this unlucky moment, at the conjuction of the paths.

With utter disgust at his position, yet, under the circumstances, equally unable to withdraw until he heard Marion's answer, Godfrey stood. Had he been guilty of

using out-of-the-way language, 'tis probable he would have cursed his unlucky stars.

Very low and trembling was her voice at first, but it cleared and strengthened as she proceeded:—

"I like you very much for my cousin, Julian. I am too young, as I told you before, to think of love."

"Ah, no—ah, no," he answered; "pity me, pity my poor life without your love."

"Then if you think I can love, and you will have an answer, is it not best that you should know I never can love you?"

"Ah, Marianna, mia Marianna, kill me not."

"It is true, Julian—it appears to me impossible. Never can I think to be your wife."

"Ah, ah," he began, his face becoming livid. "Have care, tempt me not, the curses of my heart are very deep. I will

have your love: one day you shall be my wife."

As he uttered these words, with all the concentrated feeling of a love turning to bitterness, Marion bent forward, her form dilated, her eyes grew darker; from a girl she appeared to become an earnest woman. Lightly touching his arm with her fore-finger, to enforce his attention, she said:—

"You do not know how to love. When I love, he whom I love shall know it, by the silent deeds of my life. What he wished I would wish—what he thought I would divine. If he loved me not, I would discover her whom he did love, and serve her. When I love, it will be after such fashion that I would drive it out of my heart sooner than trouble him as you do me. You love yourself best; if you loved me, I should not be thus waylaid and tormented."

Stung to the heart, Julian sprang to his feet, and she shrank in fear, but Mr. Asheton stood between them.

"Pray forgive my intrusion," he half whispered. "I came to speak both to yourself and Count Julian, that I am thus early. You will wish to go. Fly then, I will guard your retreat."

She was gone as he spoke.

"And now, Count Julian, you owe it only to your being a foreigner, that I do not at once call upon you to answer for thus forgetting the courtesy and respect due to a lady. Have you no manliness in you, that you can thus torment her to give what she cannot bestow?"

"I will have her;—she shall be my wife."

"Never, if I can prevent it. I take some blame to myself that I did not acknowledge to you I loved her. I only

refrained from doing so because you told me you meant to ask her to be your wife, and I would not interfere with your prior claims. But you deceived me; you have been refused again and again. Selfish and discourteous, you have not the manly firmness to take your rejection as a gentleman should do. Know, then, that if Miss Flower gives me the permission, the right to act as her devoted servant and intended husband, it will be my business to soften your disappointment, to be to you as a tender elder brother, until time shall have soothed you, and other claims comforted you. But if she does not, if she rejects me as well as yourself, I will yet take care that, unmolested by me and my vain regrets, you also shall have no further power to insult her more with the offer of a love she favours not. Go at once to Asheton Court, and remain there with my

father, until I return. It is the only thing you can now do to make reparation to Miss Flower."

Awed, if not cowed, by the high command, his disdain yet courtesy, his frankness and the fine honour of his words, the count shrunk back, mortified and ashamed, yet, like a weak woman, he was ready to shriek with disappointment and anger.

"I go not. I wait at this place."

"On your honour, then."

But though he received no reply, Godfrey judged him by himself, and trusted his better feelings would come to his aid; and, being impatient to settle his affairs with Marion, he turned, and rapidly followed her.

Now the count had no such feelings—he did not understand them, and he would have followed him, but his agitation was

so great, his knees smote together, his legs failed him, and he sank upon the ground utterly overcome, and here he was found by Beatrice and Prissy.

Meantime Godfrey soon overtook Marion, who had lingered, looking wistfully behind. In answer to her appealing look, he said :—

"No harm is done, Miss Flower, and none is likely to occur, when the count can bear his fate like a man. But even if he does not, I am the bearer of a message from my mother, to beg that you and your younger cousin will take refuge with her at the Court.

"She is kind—most kind. Mrs. Ford has agreed to take me after this week."

"I will go over there this evening, Miss Flower, and tell her not to expect you."

"Thank you; my sister is in grief; be-

sides, I could not tell her, she would not understand, Julian unknown to her, and I should but add to her distress."

"Say no more, pray. Do you think we are not of the same race and feelings as yourself, that we can bear and see you thus tormented, and withhold assistance? No, no; suffer me to support your steps; nay, take my arm, I have not delivered all my messages, I have one from my father. He desired me to say that you are to command his protection and care, on the condition that you call him grandfather, and love him as such."

"A condition only too precious to me. I had so many to love once, and now so few."

"Then you accept his proposal?"

"Will you say, if he is to be my grandfather, he must let me be a real grandchild. I used to do so many things for

my own grandpapa — read to him, sing to him—"

"And play backgammon with him, I have heard of that."

"Ah! then he will make me too happy. We begin this evening."

And the soft sadness that had troubled her fair face vanished under the influence of happy thoughts.

"I have given my mother's message and my father's, and you have kindly assented to each. But there is yet another petition to be laid at your feet, and the petitioner is myself. I fear, sweet Marion, that the name of love has lately been so outraged in your eyes, you will hardly have patience to hear it again. And, in justice to myself, I must acknowledge that deep as was the impression your first appearance made upon me, and strengthened as it has been ever since, I should have

hesitated to offer my hand to you until a more intimate knowledge of my family and myself could lead me to hope you would look favourably upon us. But Count Julian has not only extorted that secret from me which ought to have been yours first and only, but has rendered a protector in some measure necessary for you. Let this plead my pardon, if I have chosen an unpropitious moment for urging my suit."

Godfrey had no reason to be displeased with the various emotions that flitted over Marion's downcast, but expressive face, as he slowly poured forth this harangue.

One start, one look of uncontrolled surprise, revealed also pleasure, yet it was the pleasure of a gratified self-respect rather than love. Having been the victim of a violent and selfish love, he read as plainly as possible how her wounded wo-

man's pride appreciated his mode of addressing her. And he admired her all the more for the proper value she placed upon herself. Not that she was at all insensible to his affection. Her hand trembled, her cheek flushed, the pulse of her heart beat against his arm, and do what she would to prevent it, a smile of happiness fluttered round her mouth—a very different appearance to the aggrieved woman throwing from her the love of the count.

"You are silent, Marion—say, am I to be refused as well as Count Julian?"

"No—no—not as Count Julian."

"But I am not to be so favoured as my father and mother? My petition is to be refused, tell me, dearest Marion?"

"It is so sudden; it is—it is—my life you ask of me."

"True, and not to be idly given. I but admire you the more for this hesitation.

Yet if I could have some hope, some tangible reason to give Count Julian—"

Marion suddenly placed her hand in his, the rosy blushes ceased to rise, the clear eyes were raised to his in modest frankness.

"If Count Julian knows of this—if—if you have said that to him of me which you now say, he will guess—he will be sure. Mr. Asheton, who could love Count Julian when you—if you—I mean, Mr. Asheton and Count Julian cannot be ranked together in the estimation of an English girl."

That most beautiful of all smiles, the smile of happiness in the heart of a proud reserved nature, flooded Godfrey's eyes with joy, and gave an inexpressible charm to his countenance.

"That is," said he, modulating his voice to the softest tone of tenderness, yet archly

smiling, "I may tell the count my chance is better than his."

"Yes, yes," whispered Marion, blushing again with deepest dyes, while her heart fluttered and throbbed.

"But I am not to arrogate to myself any greater favour?" he whispered still lower, enjoying her confusion.

Large tears began to fall—one by one.

"Forgive me, I will urge no more;" and after kissing her hand, he would have withdrawn, but a gentle pressure from Marion's arm stayed him.

"Sir," she said, looking up with her innocent heart in her eyes, "there are but two of us—my sister and I; she is married, and not happy. I should like to ask her if she thinks I am capable of making—if I am fitted to be—a wife; the wife of one whom I might love with a love that angels would weep in pity to

see, did I lose his. I should like to ask her, if staking all my happiness in this world upon another, it might chance to be wrecked as hers is; because then he that would be my husband, also, would suffer as he does, that she has married. I can bear my own misery, but I fear, I know, I could not see—could not feel—he was so, and live."

It was as much as Godfrey could do, to prevent himself clasping her to his heart. Kissing her hand with the deepest devotion, his whole face glowing with the tenderest love and admiration, his voice broken with emotion, he thus replied:—

"Write to your sister, beg her to come here, to see us—to know us. I will pay to her the homage that shall he wholly yours, when you will permit me the happiness of considering it your right. But remember, if you and she decide against me, bitter as the pang may be, hear now

what I shall never suffer you to hear or feel again, that you are the first, and will be the only woman I ever loved."

He paused for a few moments. Then clearing his voice, and speaking in his usual calm tones—

"Until your sister comes, or you hear from her, we are to each other as dear friends; that you never can refuse me, having consented to be my father's granddaughter. We shall meet this evening; to my mother and father, I must confess my state of probation, and to the count who awaits my fate, not even so much, but sufficient to prove to him that my position is more favourable than his. Farewell for a time."

They parted, she evidently struggling to express her sense of all he said, but unable to do so.

If the count had been in a condition to see

Godfrey's elastic springing steps, he would at once have conjectured he was the fortunate possessor of Miss Flower's heart, and was coming towards him with the mien and steps of a conqueror. But Godfrey's elation of spirits arose from his delight and gratification at discovering that his perception of Marion's character had been so true. Though not an accepted lover, her womanly hesitation, her sudden exposure of the tender nature of her heart, undazzled by the brilliancy of such an offer, all made him love her yet more than if she had at once accepted him.

Meantime, no count was to be found. Upon inquiry he discovered that, alarmed at the state in which she found him, Beatrice had had him conveyed to the nearest house, one that was used for lodgings in the bathing season; and had, moreover, sent for Dr. Ford. Godfrey spoke to him for five

minutes alone, but the stupor of a coming brain fever prevented his comprehending anything but the words "not accepted." These he repeated again and again; at one moment with joyful rapidity, the next with the utmost anguish, plainly showing that he was incapable of distinguishing their exact sense.

Finding he had time to reach Asheton Court ere his mother left, and being of no present assistance to his unfortunate rival, Godfrey hurriedly departed. Promising Beatrice, however, to return in two hours, as much to learn the doctor's opinion as to offer his services, should they be required.

He found his father and mother sitting in a state of fidget that was most anti-Ashetonish. Without being as perfectly satis fied with Marion (after hearing all he had to say) as he appeared to be (Mrs. Asheton, in particular, was amazed at her hesi-

tation,—they were delighted with him. Never had they seen him so animated, so happy, so handsome. And apparently he must have been somewhat mistaken in his report, that he was by no means an accepted lover, for the words "My Marion," slipped out more than once, as he detailed all she said and did. And in truth, spite of that humble and deferential air with which he had addressed Miss Flower, he had no doubt in his own mind that she would be his. Not so much through her selection, but because, something like the count, he was determined to have her for his wife. Never was there seen any mortal not born an Asheton, who could charm him as she had done.

Notwithstanding his excitement and unwonted happiness, he was feelingly alive to the sad condition of the young count; and it was no more than a true finale to the

satisfaction of a day such as he had never experienced before, that he heard from Dr. Ford himself, every bad symptom was abating under the influence of prompt measures. Beatrice, too, was in a better mood to muse and watch over her cousin, as she gathered from his incoherent lips enough to satisfy her that Marion had rejected Mr. Asheton, in the same unaccountable manner as she had done the handsome and devoted Julian.

Godfrey was very happy that evening at Asheton Court, though only listening to Prissy, relating to Mrs. Asheton all she thought and felt when she first saw May, but he was watching that May talking to, and playing at backgammon with, her adopted grandfather. And strange to say, much as he had admired her self-possession, and the manner in which she seemed to ignore being the object of Count

Julian's love, he doted on, and could not resist exciting, the blush that rose so vividly to her cheek when he approached their table—the sort of start or tremor that beset her whenever he spoke. And the knowledge that, happen what would, nothing could induce her to look at him with clear and unconcerned eyes.

Mr. Asheton. "Little May Flower, you play very well; you are as good an antagonist as Godfrey."

May Flower (looking down). "Yes—no."

Mr. Asheton. "Now, would you not like a game with him?"

May Flower. "No, no—oh, no."

Mr. Asheton (beseechingly). "You will like it so much."

May Flower. "I am tired;—I think I can play no more."

Thus Mr. Asheton's first attempt at match-making was nipped in the bud.

As for the innocent and unsuspecting Prissy, she no more conjectured that her darling May had escaped from Julian's clutches only to fall into much more dangerous ones, than she could have thought her mother would have burnt one of her father's sermons.

"I am sure," said she, "it is very kind of you, getting us out of the way. Julian —but I'm never going to call him Julian again—the count was most aggravating with his nonsense. Of course May is much too young to marry. Time enough to think of that in ten years—isn't it, Mr. Asheton?"

She wondered a little at May's sitting up that night to write a long letter to her sister.

"Take my advice, and put off all disagreeable letters until the morning."

With which advice on her lips, Prissy fell asleep.

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH PRISSY GIVES HER OPINION OF LOVE MATTERS, COMMENCING UNFAVOURABLY, BUT ENDING BY ACCEPTING "THE PROPOSAL."

THERE was on the cliffs a small natural terrace of the greenest sward and the smallest dimensions. Like a natural throne gemmed with Nature's jewels, placed in a grand amphitheatre of Nature's building, this terrace contained a rocky seat, of which the green sward was the carpet of emerald velvet. It was duly canopied as a throne should be, but no perishable materials were

employed in erecting it. A grand and beetling crag bent itself over the throne, and long tendrils of ivy, briony, and periwinkle festooned it. No chandelier was necessary to light up and ornament it, for all day long, as if the sun had no other pleasure or employment, he shone upon this spot, beginning from early morning, and circling all round to dewy evening. Boisterous and rude winds, scared by the frowning appearance of the great beetling canopy, fled whisperingly by, and then, as if smitten with the beauty of the place, would steal in at the other corner, making believe to be soft zephyrs. There they lingered, playing with feathering ferns, hunting about in the greenest moss, and throwing the scent of violets all round. Displacing large velvet leaves, and disclosing the earliest, fairest primrose, until, hearing the moans and groans of their wild

playfellows seeking them, they fled out to relate the wonders they had seen, and as silence fell upon their departure, the rippling sound of dropping water beat time to the everlasting boom of the ocean.

The throne was occupied now by a queen; Marion sat thereon, reading her sister's letter in answer to hers, settling the question of her life.

It was Marion's favourite seat. Here none could be molested without ample warning, for by the path beneath the coming visitor could be seen, and from the path above rolled pebbles and stones, ever moved by the lightest foot. These fell with a warning sound, pattering like heavy raindrops on the broad ivy leaves, No one saw Marion's letter to her sister, save that sister, so it is lost to posterity; but old Mr. Asheton long preserved the answer, and it is therefore here transcribed:—

"God love and bless my sister in this the most important decision of her life. Dearest, I will answer your questions (so modestly, yet so wisely put) with the one purpose of counselling you, as if I was before the throne of our God. All the more earnest to do it, because in nothing else am I able to show my love for you.

"You seem to think, my May, that so young, so indifferently educated, you are scarcely fitted to be the wife of one as highly placed in the world's ranks as Mr. Asheton. To this I answer, if you are deficient in some things, you more than atone in others. During that brief, that most happy time which we spent together, I was struck with the quiet good sense, the quick perception, the modest self-possession of your character. You know, May, I had to regard my sister as a stranger at first, never having met before. These qualities

are not to be learnt so much by education, as they are gifts, and of incalculable value. Is there any home in the world where talent promotes the welfare of it, unless guided by good sense? Your family, your birth, both entitle you to mate as highly as you please. And in hearing that you were loved by an Asheton, I recalled to mind all I had heard of them, for our family and theirs have neighboured together, as you know, for more than one generation. As I summed up the catalogue of their character as a family, how honourable, so that the word of an Asheton was never doubted; how virtuous, for no shade of even a hasty wrong rests on their name; how charitable, I could not but thank God that my sister, so young, almost alone, almost worse than alone, with a sister who was no sister, should have gained the love of one to whom the most anxious parent

would gladly entrust her. You say that as yet it were easy to forget the honour Mr. Asheton has done you, for it is not in your nature to love suddenly and at once, and that you were unaware he regarded you at all until he asked you to be his wife; but that if time and the permission to think of him as your future husband were given you, you doubted not your whole heart would be his. Then, my May, in most innocent unconsciousness you proceed to say, 'that indeed, after having had the offer of Mr. Asheton's love, though you refrain from accepting it through a doubtful scruple as to your power to make him happy, yet you now can never accept or marry any other person,' let me whisper, dearest, that you love him already. Lastly, Marion, beloved sister, a passing allusion (ask me no more) to that one question, regarding my own happiness. Did I

not say you were discreet and wise beyond most girls of your age, few would have put a question of so delicate a nature in words so sweetly upbraiding, You say that if a blight, such as that on me and my Alan, should occur to you and the husband you might choose, you could not but fear that it were impossible for you to bear it as I do. Sister, many a time and oft we read of strange fortunes befalling one, singular and fatal accidents another, wonderful and rare afflictions a third; we read of them, and as they touch us not, they pass from our memory. One of these strange fates has fallen upon me, and I would bear it as becomes a Christian woman, yet know, one of my worst pangs was the necessity of a separation from you. But mark me, May, it was for your own good. Again, remember my position will never be yours. I thank God, my sister,

the reason for which you ask me the question does not hold good. You and your husband will never be called upon to endure my fate and that of my husband. It is but a small drop in my cup of affliction to know that I cannot obey the kind request for my presence, yet it is a very bitter one on your account, love, as I know you long for me. But with the greatest joy, with earnest thanks to God Almighty, that if, as your only and nearest relative—if, as a mother-sister, you ask my consent to your marriage, I give it. And in accepting Mr. Asheton, you remove, as regards yourself, doubt, remorse, and care from the heart of your true sister,

"KYTHE GORDON."

"My goodness me, May, what are you hiding away up here for? Me and Mr. Asheton have been watching you ever so

long on the sands, and at last I said, 'Well, she must have gone to sleep, I'd better go and wake her.' So he said, 'Do, but first steal her letter from her, and bring it to me;' but I said there was no need for that, as I dare say you would let him see the letter if he wanted."

"It is from Kythe, my sister."

"Then of course he ought'nt to want to see it—a private letter indeed!"

"But I think I shall show it to Mrs. Asheton, Prissy."

"Well, it's your letter, not mine; so of course you have a right to do as you like."

"It's about something particular, Prissy; I should like to show it to you."

"Very well; only I am not particularly interested about Lady Gordon."

"But it is about me."

"Oh, oh, read away then—I will listen."

"It is about—it is all of love, and that sort of thing, Prissy."

"The stupidest sort of thing in the world; I should have thought you would have been sickened of that, without telling your sister about Ju—about that fellow."

"It is not about Julian. It is some one else."

"Then take my advice, and don't listen to them. Nothing is so nonsensical as love affairs. I dare say now your sister wants you to marry a Scotch laird."

"No."

"Then a Scotch baronet?"

"No."

"Then a common Scotchman?"

"No; he is down there on the sands, you can see him."

"I see nobody but Mr. Asheton and two fishermen."

"It is neither of the fishermen."

"Oh, my goodness me, May, Mr. Asheton? Who says you are to marry Mr. Asheton?"

"He does."

"Oh, May!—oh!—my dear, darling, lovely May—marry Mr. Asheton? Oh, goodness gracious, how nice!"

"I thought love affairs were silly, Prissy?"

"Now don't, May, darling May; be serious."

"I wish to be serious. I want to ask your advice."

"My advice? My goodness, how nice! Of course I say—"

"Now don't be in a hurry, Prissy; listen to me. Here am I, a young, inexperienced girl—"

"You are Marion."

"I can read and write, having taught myself—"

"You are Marion."

"I shall have three hundred pounds a year in riches—"

"You are Marion."

"Now he is clever, of an experienced age—"

"But not Marion."

"Highly educated, accomplished, and refined—"

"But not Marion."

"Wonderfully rich, and gifted in every way—"

"But not Marion, so none of these things are worth that."

"Then, Prissy, you think I may accept him, and not fear that he is too good and great for me."

"Accept him, indeed—accept him at once, it is you that are too good for him. Oh, how very nice!"

"Then, Prissy, will you go down? But I don't see him now."

"I dare say he is only sitting below, waiting. I'll not be a minute running down."

"And tell him—"

"Yes, and tell him—"

"That I have gone home."

"Indeed, I'll do no such thing. A pretty sort of love message, that!"

"Well, what would you say?"

"I should run down and say, 'Mr. Asheton, please to come up.'"

"Oh, Prissy, and I to wait here to receive him!"

"Why not? If I had a lover, which I had for a week—Julian, you know—though I did not like him, so of course I can't exactly tell, but I wouldn't shilly-shally with him."

"I don't understand you — shilly-shally."

"Yes, if he is your lover, and going

to be your husband — but stop; what sort of a letter is your sister's?—does she consent?"

"Yes; she seems very glad—joyful!"

"Then I think very much better of her than I did. Of course, then, I must send Mr. Asheton up here; then you can hold out the letter to him, which will save you speaking; then he will say to me, 'Miss Priscilla, I beg you'll retire,' in his grand—"

"Miss Priscilla, I beg you will retire."

Prissy shrieked aloud. There he stood, smiling.

"My kind messenger appeared to me to have fallen asleep also," said he to Marion, bowing, with his hat off. "I thought you would see me coming up."

"She has got a letter," gasped out

Prissy, still breathless with her fright, but alive to seeing that Marion, covered with confusion, was secreting it.

"May I take it, do you think, Priscilla, as she will not hold it out to me?"

So saying, with gentle force, he took the letter from her; but as he did so, Marion turned and ran up the upper path, and before Prissy and Mr. Asheton could recover their surprise, the pattering down of little pebbles showed she was beyond catching.

"Good gracious! it was me who was to go."

"Probably she wished not to see me read her letter."

"Just so, you may be sure it's that."

"Then, my kind Priscilla—soon I hope to call cousin—perhaps you can follow her, and so arrange that I may see her alone, to return her her letter."

"To be sure, so I will; and, Mr. Asheton, pray accept my congratulations. I don't think there is anybody in the world like May; but if she is to be married, I am very glad it is to you."

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH, SPITE OF PRISSY'S APPROBATION, THE BANS ARE NEARLY FORBIDDEN.

BEFORE that day was over, Beatrice learnt that her scheme had failed. Also, before that day was over, letters, conveying the important news, were written and despatched to various quarters. Meanwhile, Marion had been kissed and blessed as their daughter by old Mr. and Mrs. Asheton, to whom she whispered, "You must tell me—you must teach me—to be

worthy of him, because I cannot think so yet."

"Pretty little modest creature," said the old gentleman to Mrs. Asheton, as they sat talking over the whole affair, "I almost think she is—"

"I can readily believe she will be so before long, my dear Mr. Asheton," answered the lady, "for I can only find one fault with her, and that is, a disposition to consider her inferiors as her equals. You remember the day we overtook her, carrying old Margaret Jones's faggot of sticks?"

"Yes, I thought how pretty she looked, carrying it so deftly on her head. She tells me she learnt to balance herself thus in India, and I dare say, my dear wife, it is the reason she carries herself so well."

"Perhaps so, but what may be pretty in Miss Flower is not to be tolerated in Mrs.

Asheton. She must be taught to keep her station intact. Now I noticed she is as attentive to Mrs. Kearn as to Mrs. Ford, which is not correct, the former being an agent's wife."

"Godfrey will soon set all that to rights. How happy he looks!"

"Yes, and how well his happiness becomes him. But this sad desire of his about the marriage—I fear the country will think it so wonderfully strange—no rejoicings, no grand *fête*, no one asked to it."

"We gave very grand *fêtes* at our daughters' marriages, my dear wife."

"That is the very reason it will be expected of us to celebrate our son's marriage with still greater *éclat*."

"But if he forbids it, we must not gainsay him, though I would have all the world rejoice."

"It is certainly true, Mr. Asheton, that

the marriage festivities generally proceed from the bride's family, and we cannot expect the Flowers to bear such an expense, and in fact they have not the experience to do it. But still I fear lest people should say, when they hear of this marriage, celebrated in so private a manner, there is some latent cause for it—that we are not perfectly satisfied—the marriage is beneath our son."

"My love, 'tis useless to distress yourself. If the Flowers were capable of celebrating the marriage in the most sumptuous manner, Godfrey would not suffer it. He told me himself at his sisters' marriages, that he never would undergo such an ordeal at his own. The little May Flower seems even better pleased than himself, that it should be perfectly private; and so that he is married, what more can we desire?"

"I will try to console myself as you do, Mr. Asheton; there is one thing in our power, and that is to celebrate Marion's introduction to the world, as Mrs. Godfrey Asheton, by a series of *fêtes* upon their return from the honeymoon."

"An excellent plan; we may defy the ill opinion of the world then. Dear little thing, how I shall love to see her acting the great lady, as I know she will do, perfectly to our satisfaction. And remember, my dear wife, I present her with all her dresses. You will take care that they are as pretty as she is herself, and don't spare my purse."

"She will, I know, feel your kindness, though probably she cannot at her age lament, as I do, over the degeneracy of the world. It is but too true that good blood and the highest breeding are scarcely so much regarded as richness of dress."

"Well, good night, my love; by this time Ellinor, at all events, knows the charming news, and how she is rejoicing over it!"

Mr. and Mrs. Trevor rented a house within thirty miles of Asheton Court; for in Cornwall, whatever might be the riches under the surface, the upper part of Mr. Trevor's estate was very poor indeed, and boasted nothing like a mansion upon it. Mrs. Trevor was always talking of the house they were to build, or rather castle, for she spoke of Trevor castle as an abode in such complete existence, that she deluded some of her friends into proposing paying her visits, whereas not a stone of it was laid, —not the site even chosen. But of late years since that charming cognomen of Mrs. Trevor Asheton had become so familiar to her mind, she had of course reasoned with herself that it was absurd to build Trevor

castle, when they would eventually be settled at Asheton Court; consequently, they rented a house called Mannering Hall, which name, some folks said, only required a *G* in it, to be very appropriately named.

Thus a purpose messenger was sent over to Mannering Hall, with the important news of Mr. Godfrey Asheton's intended marriage. As Sir Robert Fane did not hear of it until the following day, through the ordinary medium of the post, we will treat of Mrs. Trevor's "delight" first.

Has no one of my readers experienced a day of unwonted satisfaction, or a time of high self-sufficiency. When all that has passed throughout the day has been pleasant, and that pleasantness has been owing entirely to yourself—your wisdom, your forethought, your superior judgment. Mrs. Trevor was in one of these moods on this particular day; she had begun it by

bullying Mr. Trevor's mining agent, who had come over on business, and so satisfactorily, that she had made him confess "Mrs. Trevor surprised him." What a delightful homage to her judgment! She "surprised" that wonderful man, the mining agent, who was not supposed to know what being "surprised" was.

"I should not at all wonder," said she to Mr. Trevor, "if you now obtain your just and proper income for the future; the man will be afraid of me."

Also she had gained a notable victory over that remarkably clever woman, Miss Pratt, her daughters' governess.

Miss Pratt had declared a new plant to be of the genus "cheirostemon," because the calyx was sparsely stellate-pubescent outside, and densely villeis within.

Mrs. Trevor said "no such thing."

Miss Pratt, upon investigation, had to

acknowledge herself mistaken, but she hesitated in according to Mrs. Trevor superior knowledge; and she was certainly not mistaken in that, for Mrs. Trevor had only contradicted her for contradiction's sake.

Finally, she had, accompanied by her husband, attended a dinner party in the neighbourhood, where she made herself, as she considered, peculiarly agreeable.

"I took care to show my lord, though I was a woman, I was perfectly capable of giving an opinion on the whole, and he soon perceived it. I must do him the justice to say, that he did not utter a word after that."

"Of course, dear Ellinor."

"In fact, the neighbourhood is becoming now pretty well aware that there is no deceiving me. It is astonishing the silence and respect with which they listen to me. I look forward to a time, Trevor (Mr.

Trevor's name was Thomas, which was the only thing Mrs. Trevor did not like about him), when, our girls grown up, we altogether, with my brother, shall introduce a marked change in society. It will be a work of time, but it shall be done."

"No doubt, dear Ellinor."

"Asheton Court will of course be the arena on which the first phases of it shall appear, diffusing all around brilliant rays of genius, which will attract the wise and noble of other countries besides our own. During my father's and mother's life-time, I can expect to do little; they are wedded to the customs of their father and mother, without apparently the least ambition to improve them. Ah! we are at home; how quickly time flies when absorbed in intellectual conversation; our drive of four miles has appeared to me but one."

"Most true, dear Ellinor."

"A purpose messenger from Asheton Court," exclaimed Mrs. Trevor, the butler officiously handing her the important missive, as she stepped out of the carriage; "lights immediately."

It might have occurred to the anxious daughter of a barbarian to say to the servant, "No bad news, I trust." Not so to Mrs. Trevor; of what use was the letter, if she was to learn the news of it from a servant?

Preparing herself for any event, she assumed the countenance proper for some shock; but as she read, the news was too painful to be endured in any other manner than genuinely. She did not say she could have borne to read of the sudden death of either father or mother better, but it was perfectly plain to any one who might choose to interpret her countenance, that Godfrey's

intended marriage was a much more bitter blow.

Pale and aghast, she threw the letter from her, exclaiming, "We must stop it." Then instantly snatching it up again, "Too late, too late," she muttered in real anguish.

For the first time in his life, an idea rose to Mr. Trevor's mind, the effort of but a few seconds.

"She must be going mad."

However, he had not courage to enunciate it.

Mrs. Trevor's night was very much the reverse of her pleasant day. Her reflections were all the more bitter, because she felt herself powerless. The common every-day cunning of a small mind instinctively told her it was her next policy to be "delighted" with news that gave her, for the first time in her life, the experience of real grief.

She absolutely wept, to Mr. Trevor's manifest horror and alarm; such instances of weakness being almost unknown in his adored and talented Ellinor.

Many people have a knack of talking away their anger or disappointment. But words only fed hers, and she arose in the morning even more irritated than she went to bed at night. Yet the messenger was waiting to go.

"Shall I send to say you are ill, my loved one," murmured Mr. Trevor, becoming quite inspired by the urgency of the case.

"No, no; it is necessary that I should send them my opinion. My brother, of course, will be anxious for my approbation. I may, perhaps, be able to put in a little word, a remonstrance by which we can delay matters for a time, until we are certain that this young lady is fitted to

be Godfrey's wife. *I* have not seen her yet, you know; and I cannot but feel astonished that my brother should have gone so far, without previously sending for me —we think so exactly alike."

"Most true, dear Ellinor."

"He certainly says something about his intentions having been precipitated by unwonted events; but as for Mr. and Mrs. Asheton, they appear to me to have utterly forgotton everything due to themselves or their son."

"Ah, indeed, my love."

"Do you not perceive how much more they say of the young lady than my brother? I know he wishes for me. I think 'twould be as well if I went, instead of wrote, Trevor?"

"Better, far better, my excellent Ellinor."

"And yet I shall feel too much."

"Far, far too much, my poor Ellinor."

"Then leave me for a time. I require total solitude to write the sort of letter that ought to gain influence in such a matter."

Ordinary mortals would have thought the missive thus composed remarkably ill-judged, not to say impertinent. But it was larded with so many protestations of the "deepest love," "the anxious fears," "the more than ordinary solicitude necessary for the marrying of an Asheton—and such an Asheton"—with other truly monstrous "sops" of family conceit and exclusiveness, that none of the three readers of it found any fault with it. There was one little hit in it, regarding "her brother deigning to look upon a Flower, and that she trusted early measures would be taken to remind the rest of that marvellously lucky family they were not to presume to

encroach because of the fortune Fate had showered on one," which just nettled Mr. Asheton in the slightest degree. However, he speedily consoled himself, and excused her, by saying:—

"But, indeed, poor Ellinor, she has not yet seen our May Flower."

CHAPTER XII.

NOTWITHSTANDING MORE "NOES," ALL ENDS IN AN "AY."

Sir Robert Fane came in to dress for a seven o'clock dinner, hot and tired with a day's shooting on the moors. He was disposed—very rare for him—to be in a bad humour, and was not put into a better one by finding his toilette-table in a state of utter confusion.

It evidently arose from no fault of his valet, for it appeared as if imps of mischief

had been at work. All the brushes were in every place but the right one, and all daubed with some odious compound. The scent bottles were upset, and their contents evaporating all over the table. The combs were *non est*, the soap in his boots, and his slippers under the grate.

"Confound that young imp, this is too much of a good thing. I'll have him punished."

And he strode into his wife's boudoir with a step uncommon to him.

A fair-haired, pretty boy, with sharp mischievous eyes, shrunk instinctively within the voluminous folds of his mother's dress, as the angry father appeared.

Ere Sir Robert could say a word, Lady Fane exclaimed, in a most animated voice for her:—

"Oh, Robert, I am so delighted to see you! Such charming news! I thought of

sending an express messenger to meet and tell you, but I wished so much to see your surprise and delight. Our dear Godfrey is going to marry a very pretty little charming girl—a Miss Flower."

"The devil!" exclaimed Sir Robert, and had just sufficient presence of mind left to bolt out of the room. There we had better leave him for the present, and meet him again at dinner.

By this time, as became a man of the world whose fortunes fluctuate between morning and evening, he was quite composed, and enabled to tell Master Fane, with the courtesy of a polite father, that if he caught him in his dressing-room again he should think it necessary to make him acquainted with the merits of a horse-whip.

"Why, what has the poor child done?" asked his mother.

Sir Robert gave a *historiette* of his toilette sufferings during the process of dressing.

"You know he has so little to amuse him," pleaded Lady Fane.

"Then allow him to take us in turns, my dear Cecilia. You can arrange your Mother's toilette to-morrow, my boy."

"Was it this trifling annoyance, my dear Sir Robert, that made you use that extraordinary word?" asked his lady.

"A word—pray what word?"

"But being unable to pronounce it, and their guests entering, no more was said.'

A good dinner softens down a multitude of woes. Generous wines disperse the vapours of ill-temper, as the sun drinks up mists. By the time dinner was over, Sir Robert was nearly himself; before he went into coffee, he was perfectly resigned, and had even succeeded among his guests in making a very good book, upon the chance

of Mr. Godfrey Asheton having no second son.

At all events he had three more years' certain enjoyment of the Rollinston Estates; and he had that opinion of the softness (query, greenness) of Mr. Godfrey Asheton's nature, as to build some hopes upon a small allowance, perhaps a thousand a year, being accorded to Lady Fane, as compensation for deposing her from the position of an heiress; therefore among all the congratulatory letters that poured in upon Mr. Godfrey Asheton, none pleased them so much as Sir Robert's. There was a frankness, a heartiness, quite delightful in it, and not a single allusion to what might be a very serious loss to him. He was a proof among many, how true was the maxim of the "Inspired Book"—"The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light."

He knew the Asheton family were generous in the largest sense of the word, and he took the best means in his power to command their affection and sympathy. Thus we see Sir Robert resigned himself to his fate without a struggle. Mrs. Trevor made a few feeble remonstrances that all died of weakness; Miss Beatrice Flower failed altogether.

Fate decided that a purpose of marriage should be fulfilled between Godfrey Asheton and Marion Flower, and was galloping rapidly towards fulfilment of it.

In "Union is strength." It is hardly possible to tell if, at this early period, any idea entered into the head of Beatrice to make use of the peculiar sins of the respective parties now about to be joined together in holy matrimony, with the amiable purpose of eventually procuring a divorce between them, according to the

various modes now allowed by Parliament.

Or if, at the same time, Mrs. Trevor vowed to herself she would make the new Mrs. Asheton understand that she was "the clever one" of the family; and if she would not permit her, as her due, to rule pre-eminent still at Asheton Court, war would be declared between them, and then of course Mrs. Godfrey would have to succumb.

Or, that Sir Robert might say to himself, "These Ashetons are as peculiar as somebody down below. There can be no harm in my taking any little advantage of such whims, it being no fault of mine, their indulging in them."

Philosophers teach us that illimitable space is filled with invisible matter, divided into infinitesimal fractions, which remain floating in ambient atmosphere, until meeting with

the corresponding particle destined for such purpose, they are instantly called into life, and fulfil the purpose for which they were created.

As with matter, so it may be with mind. Various ideas, countless thoughts, and ever-changing feelings fill the human brain with endless particles. These rise and die daily. But if they meet with a corresponding particle in another mind, so far from dying, they spring into active life, and become the actions by which human beings are governed. It remains to be seen if these thoughts, inimical to the happiness of the intended bride and bridegroom, rising in three different brains, and innocuous while floating singly, ever met, and became, in consequence of union and sympathy, a living and acting principle.

But we have not married them yet.

Godfrey found (as who has not?) that the

amber-tinted days of courtship were now and then rather clouded. Marion did not appear, on the whole, so entirely happy and delighted with her high fortune as he could have wished.

Her gay sweet laughter was no longer heard. Her clear eyes had that indescribable touch of sadness in them, that a young girl might be excused feeling when she changes a life of unconcerned maidenhood for that of wifedom.

She was nervous and timid. She had tears in her eyes when they spoke of Julian and his hapless state, and altogether she was thinking less of being allied to the Ashetons than she ought to have done.

But her demeanour was nothing in comparison to the annoyance occasioned by Mrs. Flower. That good lady, in the warmth of her large heart, took in the whole family of Asheton Court at once. They were all

"dears" and "darlings." She confided to them all her family concerns, and was caught running all over Asheton like a tame cat. She had been heard in the village to talk of "my nephew Godfrey," and was in every respect rendering herself peculiarly obnoxious, without being in the least aware of it.

The state of Count Julian bordered so decidedly upon the ridiculous whims and caprices of a spoilt school-boy, that few gave him credit for real feeling; yet it was so only he had no more manly mode of expressing it. One of his relations had been sent for, and he was removed before the preparations for the marriage became very marked. Beatrice had at one time an inclination to accompany them to her Italian home; but that peculiar state of a diseased mind, morbidness, induced her to remain until the deed was really done. Even

going so far as to assist at it, in the shape of one of the bridesmaids. She might have had some sort of idea that a loop-hole would occur, of which she would take immediate advantage. Besides, it was not so much her heart that was hurt, as her ambition and vanity. Had she been in love with Mr. Asheton, she must have fled like the count, but being enamoured of Asheton Court, she was fully able to remain, with all her senses on the alert, and seize upon any forlorn hope Fate might be tempted to hold out to her.

A most "forlorn hope," she allowed, but until they were married, she must indulge this hope; afterwards, she would content herself with hating the unconscious Marion, and doing her all the mischief she was able, by way of reprisal. Mrs. Trevor having taken a week to soften down any little asperities, was now at Asheton Court,

High Priestess of everything. To say that she was struck with Marion's prettiness and grace, expresses very little. She acknowleged at once, though only to herself, that Godfrey's "infatuation" (as she was pleased to call a most measured and dispassionate love) was reasonable, while her father and mother also were excused being a little *tête montée*. But the feeling of admiration brought with it no corresponding efforts at sisterly affection. On the contrary, as she felt glad and self-laudatory, that such singular beauty should belong to the Ashetons, so did she experience the necessity of keeping down (what barbarians call "snubbing") the possessor of such influential powers. She meant to love her as a sister, only if she proved meek, quiet, and capable of ruling her actions solely to the nod of Mrs. Trevor's "clever" head.

Marion was awed by her intended sister-

in-law's manner, though grateful for the patronizing attention she paid her. According to her usual habit, she made the best of everything, and Prissy backed her up, in admiration of Mrs. Trevor's sense and cleverness. For it had been coeval with Prissy's knowledge of A. B. C., an awe of, and deference for, that superior lady.

"Lady Fane's the prettiest, you know, May, but, my goodness, Mrs. Trevor's beyond everything. In fact, I don't know what she isn't. And if she is pleased with you—and she wouldn't be a sensible woman, if she wasn't—then, May, there's no more to be said."

Gathering as much comfort as she could out of Prissy's somewhat vague opinions, Marion prepared for her marriage with feelings utterly undefinable to the Ashetons themselves.

The vicissitudes of her young life, the

small experience she had had of the quiet monotony of home duties, the prompt energy that was often needed to save life itself, the never-ending changes and fears of those connected with an army in active service, had given Marion a faith and trust in One alone, that became as necessary to her as the air she breathed.

It was with the most profound feelings of love and hope, that she besought the only "Father" she now possessed to fit her for the new station in which she was about to enter. The very simplicity of her nature made her the more earnest in prayer. As she hoped much, she loved more; the enthusiasm which lay concealed under so much elasticity of youth and spirits, imparted for the time being an elevation of heart and soul that almost appeared to keep her at the footstool of the Almighty. And at a time when other girls

would have had no eyes but for their lover, no thoughts but about their *trousseaux*, or, at best, but a wonderful mixture of all sorts of feelings connected with this most important period, our innocent little half-educated Marion sat hour by hour in the natural throne, canopied by the beetling crag, beseeching God's blessing on her endeavours to be a good and loving wife.

Let whoever among her own or intended relations that cavilled at, or complained of, her apathy and indifference to happiness and joy beyond the usual lot of brides, all was forgotten as, attended by Beatrice, the faithful Prissy, and the two little white Miss Trevors, all as bridesmaids, with a limited number of relations, Marion gave her hand to Godfrey Asheton, with the earnestness, the devotion, the and love of the angels she so much resembled.

CHAPTER XIII.

TREATS HOW RUMOUR CAN CHANGE A FAIR BRIDE INTO A BLACK WOMAN.

To the world at large, and their neighbourhood in particular, the Ashetons were not rated so high in value as their own estimation of themselves warranted. They were good for a certain number of dull entertainments, which everyone voted as nuisances, yet to which everyone scrupulously went, as the only outward mark that the Ashetons

gave of an affinity with barbarians. They were acknowledged to be sufficiently high principled never to ask anyone to dinner without giving him an excellent one, immaculately dressed and served. Also once a year they gave a ball, which was not so highly regarded, as, taking high example, they would close this ball just as fast young ladies and dancing-mad officers considered "the fun" to begin. Very decorous balls they were, though the best champagne flowed freely. But the very fact of being inspirited by such a renovator (rather unusual at balls, where hot rooms and unbearable thirst will make dancers swallow anything) made it the harder to be so summarily dismissed.

Thus, their balls did not add much to their popularity. According to the measure of their neighbourly qualities, they performed some of their duties well, but might do them a great deal better. A faint

show of rising popularity, and desire to make much of them, attended the coming out of the Miss Ashetons, with that eligible "parti," their only brother, in the background. But if the old Ashetons had been reserved and proud, the young ones were doubly so. The early marriage of the only sweet tempered one, Lady Fane, the disdainful bearing of Miss Ellinor, and the hauteur and exclusiveness of the young heir, banished them all back to the land of Tabooism—a land they had hedged in themselves.

The mothers of England bear a somewhat indifferent character as regards the pertinacity with which they first hunt up, and then hunt down, an elder son. But they are much maligned. In fact, we have already shown that Mr. Godfrey Asheton was quite at a loss where to look for a wife. And it may fairly be inferred that

the matrons belonging to his country were unanimously averse to bestowing their dear, merry girls upon a man who had the look of a Lucifer, or, in other words, went about the world as if remarkably displeased with everything within it.

Thus, while the rest of the county feasted, laughed, talked, married, and quarrelled together, the Ashetons not only held aloof, but were kept aloof, and could not be said to have advanced one step towards sociability and intercourse with any of their neighbours for the last fifty years.

They were apparently forgotten until their turn for dinner giving came. Mr. Godfrey Asheton was as a thing of nought, because he held himself invulnerable.

But when it began to be bruited around that Mr. Godfrey Asheton was going to be married, an electric shock ran through the county. To whom?—who was she?—a

lady in her own right?—a young dowager duchess?—a German princess?—or some little unearthly being out of a star created on purpose for him?

Before it could be settled—all had been kept so quiet—the deed was done, he was married. The demand for the county newspaper was so great, to see if it was really true, that the first edition sold off in half an hour, and more than one carriage was seen patiently waiting at the office-door for the first impression of the second edition.

And yet how disappointingly meagre was the news!—

"On the 6th of November, by the Rev. Constantine Flower, Godfrey Asheton, only son of Rupert Asheton, Esq., of Asheton Court, of Marion, second daughter of the late Colonel Flower, A.D.C. to General Aubrey, E.I.C. Artillery."

"The idea," remarked one young lady,

"of one of those proud Ashetons being married, and only by one clergyman. I thought they would be assisted by two or three at the least."

"Nay," said another, "to think, after all his airs, he has only married a plain Miss, and she seems to have belonged to some Colonel in an Indian Regiment, perhaps the daughter of a black woman."

"Ah! that's just it," answered the other; "she probably is the offspring of some Begum, or native princess, whom those stupid Ashetons, knowing no better, think of high rank. I hope mamma will go and call; I am dying of curiosity."

"So am I; the more so as I always thought that Italian girl meant to have him. Why, I gave him up on her account, not only because she was so much handsomer than I am, but had so many favourable advantages to prosecute her claims."

"Ha, ha, well—she seems foiled as much as yourself. It would be rather good fun to ride over there to-day, as if we knew nothing about the matter. We can pump it all out of the young one, she is so immensely innocent."

"Do—I have been wanting a breath of sea-air for some time."

They acted accordingly, took their canter on the sands, and then drew up at the Wood-head, ostensibly to ask for a biscuit and glass of wine.

Mrs. Flower was emerging, boots laced, shawled, and bonneted, out of the door, with a purpose of "doing" the parish, when they reined up.

"Nothing was so fortunate as her not having started."

"Nothing would distress them so much if she did not start."

Thus they banded civilities, perfectly sin-

cere on good Mrs. Flower's side, and indeed equally sincere on theirs, for to be closeted with Mrs. Flower, and have their justifiable efforts at information smothered in parish details was more than they could endure.

"The Miss Flowers are at home, surely."

"Oh, yes; both my daughters are, I believe."

"Then they will take care of us."

And with many regrets on Mrs. Flower's part, with assurances that she would remain, if they wished it, she departed. Prissy only was in the room when they entered, and as they asked for biscuits and sherry, rung for that and no more, for she always said what she thought, and supposed every one did the same.

Beatrice, meeting the servant, ordered luncheon instead, but it did not seem that this civility on her part benefited the

two young ladies, regarding their thirst for knowledge more than Prissy's milder order of biscuits and sherry. At last, as if suddenly smitten by the lightening up of an idea, Prissy said—

"Oh! the cake;—they must have some cake, you know, Beatrice."

"I have ordered luncheon," answered Beatrice, coldly.

"Oh," said Prissy, shut up.

"Cake—what cake?" asked No. 1 young lady.

"The bride cake, of course," returned Prissy with alacrity.

"A bride cake! really—who has been married?"

"Our Marion."

"I beg your pardon, I have not the honour of knowing your Marion."

"Our cousin Marion."

"And whom did she marry?"

"Oh! Mr. Godfrey Asheton—he is a much nicer person than people think."

"Priscilla, go and see if luncheon is ready," said her sister—whose delicate cheek became flushed like the sunny side of a peach.

"Yes, that I will," said the obedient Prissy.

"You know, of course, by the papers, of my cousin's marriage," said Beatrice haughtily, and with an air, as much as to say, Ask no more questions. "Mr. Asheton is not likely to marry, without all the world knowing it. Do you like the new opera-house?"

Half an hour after this, having had their luncheon, tasted the cake, ordered their horses, mounted, and set off home, the two young ladies reckoned up their budget of news.

No. 1. "I could extract nothing further

from that Italian girl. I wonder if she is disappointed—she put me in mind of a summer's day, with a heavy thunder cloud overhead, ready to burst upon one at a minute's notice."

No. 2. "Neither could I make much out of the other. I suspect she is very deep."

(Dear innocent Prissy, whose spring was so shallow, she was pumped out in a minute.)

"I asked her if she liked her cousin's marriage, and she said, 'Oh! of course, far better than the other one.' When I said I knew nothing about the other one, she answered, 'No more you ought to—Marion will be very angry with me.' 'Marion, as you call her,' said I, 'must be a great beauty, handsomer than your sister.' 'Oh! there never was any one so handsome as Beatrice,' (Prissy had early

imbibed that idea, and never lost it)—but Marion is such a darling.' 'Has she lived with you long?' 'Very nearly all the time since she came from India.' 'Her mother was born in India, I suppose?' 'Oh, of course; but, indeed, I never asked.' 'A great lady?' 'No; I think she was a very little woman.' Now don't you see from these answers, Julia, that she intended purposely to mislead me."

No. 1. "I rather agree with you, Maria; little wretch, I should like to shake her!"

No. 2. "Evidently they have got hold of the poor young man, who, not used to the society of real gentlewomen, has been taken in by this fancied princess."

No. 1. "However, we know more than anyone, and shall have plenty to tell to-night."

No. 2. "Yes; let us canter on, that no one may be beforehand."

Thus the world of ——shire became violently agitated with the startling news that Mr. Godfrey Asheton had married a black woman, because she was a princess. That Miss Beatrice Flower had been sacrificed, he having been positively engaged to her. That the princess had many lacs of rupees in a trunk, and was married in yellow satin, broidered in pearls, with a chain of diamonds round her throat, rudely set, but of incalculable value, three yards long. And that the marriage was kept secret until the last moment, for fear there should be any public demonstration caused by the dusky hue of the lovely bride.

When people will hold themselves aloof from the rest of the world, they must be prepared to submit to any amount of stories circulated about them. And during the visits that were paid at Asheton Court, in compliment to the interesting event, that

indifference to the world's opinion, which characterised them, rather added to the mystery of the unknown bride, than simplified it. They would have been amazed had they been told one half of what the county said, losing all sense of the ridiculousness of the reports in the much greater presumption of anyone daring to dictate to an Asheton whom he was to marry.

Thus the winter passed away, and the excitement abated nothing, but rather increased. Parliament met, and people went to town, where they spread the news still further. Lent came, but no one appeared to think that, because you were enjoined to fast in one way, your tongue might not go all the faster in another.

Easter brought country people to their country homes for a brief holiday, during which they plucked violets, wore primrose-wreaths, and talked of the bore of returning

to town, and the great mystery yet unfathomed.

But, no; rumour was satisfied, reality should give place to conjecture. On many tables lay the large, embossed, well-known Asheton invitation-card. So many for dinner one day, so many for another, the whole to wind up with a ball to all the county. Astonishing! The Ashetons could not be ashamed of the black princess; or, presuming upon their position, they intended to show they would not be ashamed of her. She would probably be made fair with pearls, or sparkling with diamonds. At all events, no one was so mad as to prefer their spring delights to this attempt at town gaiety. Fresh toilets were ordered from the London milliners; and, curious as the ladies had been, it yet was not unworthy of note to remark that, whenever two or three grey-headed, sage, political old

gentlemen met together, they were sure to be heard saying, "Going to the Ashetons?" "Ah, of course we must all go to see the Black Princess!"

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW LITTLE IT TAKES TO PLEASE PEOPLE—WHEN THEY ARE IN THE HUMOUR.

GODFREY and Marion were returning from their wedding tour, which, at that untoward season of the year, had, at their own wish, been confined to Welsh and English scenery.

"I have lived abroad," pleaded she, "until I long for England only."

"A great pity, my dear Godfrey," re-

marked Mrs. Trevor; "it shows such a want of refined and intellectual taste."

While all the rest of the family were occupied in the arrangements for the fitting introduction of their new relative into the Asheton world, old Mr. Asheton alone thought of nothing but his delight at the prospect of seeing his little "May Flower once more."

"I cannot help calling her so, little dear thing, though happily she is May Flower no longer."

"I do not at all understand my father's infatuation," again remarked Mrs. Trevor, who appeared to hear everything, whether it concerned her or not.

"Your father took a great fancy to her from the first. And Godfrey's wife must ever be an object of the deepest interest to him. I hardly ever, my dear Ellinor, experienced so many acceptances to our dinner parties.

I followed the usual rule of asking one third more than our table will hold, to make up for any probable refusals."

"The two girls from the Wood-head must come in the evening, I presume, if we are too many."

Lady Fane and Sir Robert had not yet been introduced to their new sister. That delicacy of health, mentioned before, necessitated Lady Fane's confinement to one atmosphere during the winter, and Sir Robert was not sufficiently stoical to go and witness the deed that might deprive him of four thousand a year. So he had excused himself. But they were both expected in the evening of this day, when Marion, but three days returned, sat by her father-in-law's chair, relating to him the history of her travels. In all other parts of the house were the bustle and confusion attendant upon the large party expected that evening.

"And my May Flower is now happy, certain that she is a worthy little wife to my Godfrey.

Marion smiled, as if she felt it might be so, yet dared not yet say it."

"And are you pleased, dear, with your dresses?"

"How kind you have been, dear grandfather. I have heard of them—not seen them."

"Dear, dear, how was that? Don't you try such things on? I told Ellinor to be sure about that."

"Godfrey has seen them, and he was pleased."

"Well, well, I hope they are all right. You know, my love, we are very anxious you should look your very best to-night. I want my May Flower to please all the world."

"And she wishes to please Godfrey, and those who love him."

"True, my dear, very prettily said. But still, I must have you look nice, to do justice to Godfrey's taste. Now, there is your pretty cousin."

"Yes, she is beautiful. Why did not Godfrey choose her? I never saw anything like her—did you, grandfather."

"Not so handsome, certainly;—but you look serious, dear little one."

"It is nothing; but I shall be glad when a year is over. By that time I shall know—shall feel—if I am likely to be all that Godfrey wishes."

"You are wrong, May Flower—very wrong—you ought to have no mistrust in Godfrey."

"I do not mistrust him—it is myself."

Ere Marion could say more, the door opened, and Mrs. Asheton entered, saying that Lady Fane had arrived, and wishes to know when she can see her father.

"Surely now—at once," exclaimed the old gentleman; "my children ought not to use ceremony with me."

But little mysterious ceremonies were the only characteristic possessed by Lady Fane. She entered with a pretty rustle of importance, clasped her father rather theatrically round the neck, presenting her cheek to be kissed, then withdrew, as if to look at him. Finally, turning towards Marion, said in a soft, sweet voice:—

"My new sister."

Marion saw that she might obey the dictates of her tender heart towards Lady Fane, though she could not towards Mrs. Trevor. Coming forward at once, she kissed with her healthy red lips the hectic cheek of Lady Fane, who instantly kissed her again, saying, "Dear little thing," but Marion had nearly fallen over something concealed in the folds of Lady Fane's dress.

To her surprise, a little fair face, with a very old, wizard-like look, peeped out.

"My darling, speak to grandpapa."

Instantly the face disappeared, and the dress was violently agitated.

"Hush, then, hush—no one shall speak to you. Excuse him, dear father, he is so sadly shy."

"So are my little granddaughters, and yet you, my children, always ran to me in love."

"He is far from strong, father; his nerves are as delicate as his frame. Sir Robert is on his way. The carriage which you so kindly sent only held us, with Edward's and my maid, so he follows in a fly with the luggage. My new sister is somewhat pale, I think."

"No," said Mrs. Trevor, just entering, "she has a remarkably high colour. My dear sister, how are you?"

"Quite well, thank you, love."

"You don't look so. Indeed, you look very ill; you have not brought Edward, I see."

"Oh, yes; here he is, as usual, quite close to mamma."

"Dear me! still tied to your apron-strings—so big a boy! Edward, I am ashamed of you. But, Marion, you ought —you must go and dress; you have but an hour and a half to do so."

"I will go out first to get some violets for Lady Fane," answered Marion, glad to depart.

She divined, as she gathered her violets, that the sisters were very like other sisters, not always on the best of terms.

Marion's toilette would have proceeded very well but for the constant interruption of either Mrs. Asheton or Mrs. Trevor,—they were so nervously anxious she should look well.

"Dear heart alive!" exclaimed Pinner, the maid, as she was ordered by Mrs. Trevor to undo a thick Grecian plait, just executed with the utmost care; "it will take me an hour to do it up again—you will never be dressed in time, ma'am."

"Lock the door, then, Pinner, and we will do my hair after our own fashion—there is a carriage driving up now."

Few people ever give a dinner-party, that some *contre-temps* does not occur. With the Ashetons 'twas as well nothing worse happened than that Marion, who was to have been dressed first, in order to be regularly introduced as each party arrived, appeared about the last.

Sir Robert Fane, notwithstanding she had such a momentous fiat upon his affairs, was but little interested in an introduction. It was enough that she might deprive him of four thousand a year. Were she as pretty

as an angel, she would look ugly to him. He had heard the rumour about the black princess, and had contented himself with laughing at it without contradicting it. If he had taken the trouble of thinking about her at all, he imagined from his idea of Godfrey's taste, that she was a tall sort of statue-like girl, with faultless features, a cold stony manner, and general freeziness of appearance.

He was rather surprised not to find her in the drawing-room; and sheltering within the ample folds of a window-curtain, he there occupied himself in his favourite amusement, namely, speculating upon the private characters of all the different parties ushered into the room, as they arrived — drawing inferences from their appearances, and the various modes in which they entered, and paid their compliments. He considered it by no means unpleasant amusement, but

rather savouring of his favourite game of chance, to calculate the future fate of those to whom he was introduced. Whether they ended ill or well, did not so much concern him, as that he should be found right in his first judgment.

His amusement, however, appeared not likely to be great this evening, which we shall discover if we follow the flight of his thoughts.

"The old hum-drum lot, not a single new face, save those beardless noodles from the barracks. My fair sister-in-law, as usual, disturbing everyone, and most properly indignant with Mrs. Flower for taking the seat meant, of course, for the Duchess. She will succeed in dislodging her; pray Heaven she comes not my way. Ha! my dear wife, and of course, that little imp of mischief (Sir Robert's bump of philoprogenitiveness was small), who ought to be in bed. Miss

Flower is looking my way, and appears handsomer than ever. I'll beckon her over here, and for lack of other amusement, gaze into her lustrous eyes. How Godfrey could withstand placing so beautiful a creature at the top of his table, I know not."

Then aloud, "Thank you, Miss Flower; I assure you I was so dull, until I caught a glimpse of you. I was driven to bet my right hand against my left, as to what old friend would appear next. They don't seem to me ever to have any new people to dinner here."

"No; it is against Asheton rules, to make new acquaintances."

"But where is the bride? I am all anxiety to see her."

"I presume she is making a very elaborate toilette; and it is your own fault you have not seen her before."

"True; but does she require much dressing up?"

"Rather, to make her look like a great lady, for she is a mere girl."

Here, a particle of thought floating about in the brain of Sir Robert, hit an idea running in the head of Beatrice, and gave birth at once to an active principle, of which at present neither knew or felt the existence.

"I always hoped you would be the chief ornament of this house, Miss Flower. It requires a strong attraction, both mentally and physically, to redeem it from intolerable dulness."

A gleam of sudden anger shot from Miss Flower's dark eyes, which rewarded Sir Robert for his speech, revealing to him what he had strongly suspected.

"I have always understood," answered she bitterly, "that Sir Robert Fane had

too deep an interest another way, to wish to see anyone in the position he so courteously assigns me."

"Pardon me, when one's fate is inevitable, grant a poor wretch a faint hope of making the best of it. You were an old friend. I have heard nothing of this bride."

"Doubtless, when you see her, you will follow the world."

"Is she so lovely, then?"

"No woman can be a judge of what a man admires. A pretty girlish face sets one of your sex raving, so that he cannot see what species of innocent may be behind it."

"It will be happier for your cousin if she is such as you lead me to infer; she will suffer less in running counter—"

"Yes, Sir Robert; you pause—"

He still remained silent, and on looking

up, she saw his eyes absorbed in watching the entrance of some fresh arrivals.

"Say, who is that but now entered, a vision in white? Hush! what a silence! you need not tell me; I see it is your cousin."

"What a preposterous dress for a dinner-party," murmured Beatrice.

It was of white silk, glistening with silver threads; a few leaves of silver lay on her hair, rippled in dark and light shades, and from these leaves fell long waving grass, half green, half silver. She was a little flushed, and this background of green and white had a beautiful effect. A single row of pearls round her throat gave a regal air to it, and beyond her blushing cheek, there was nothing of shyness about her. She was as self-possessed as if indeed a queen.

Not having heard the buzz of universal small talk that pervaded ere they entered

the room, she leant lightly on Godfrey's arm, quite unaware of the sudden and entire silence that followed their appearance. Godfrey had expressed himself as satisfied with her dress and looks—and both being unenlightened regarding the black princess, they were, of course, unable to judge of the effect her *entrée* occasioned.

She went through her various introductions with that simplicity which gives both ease and grace, and before she arrived at Sir Robert — on whom, secretly, Godfrey wished her to make a good impression — he had been able to speculate upon her character, and back his right hand against the left as to her future.

Miss Flower was right in her saying that most men are more struck with simplicity, and innocency of expression, than with beauty. And though Marion looked lovely, the charm of her ingenuous coun-

tenance and manner won Sir Robert's admiration at once. Indeed, he was so absorbed watching her, that Miss Flower's remarks were unheeded.

"Lucky dog, Godfrey," was his inward thought. "Why is it that Fortune is so bountiful in her favours to some, and such a sorry jade to others? This girl appears created on purpose for him, for not even an Asheton can cavil at her face or manners. Yet, she must have some fault, some blemish; she is not weak in character—her chin is too well defined; her eyes too clear, too frank to be afraid of any one. Should she run counter—Ha! she will kiss that round-faced cousin of hers, and talk to her aunt, he chafes, and she does not see it.—She will do what she considers right, let Asheton will rise like mountains in her path. Poor girl, she has that rare thing, a fine heart; will it become ossified by

Asheton pride? I can only judge of women as they do of race-horses, and I'll back my right hand against my left for a thousand guineas she turns restive, and either conquers or dies. I beg your pardon, Miss Flower, but I, as well as the rest of this august company, am amazed at the fair vision of Mrs. Godfrey Asheton. I was credibly informed that she was the daughter of a dark and woolly-headed princess of Oude. Allow for a poor man being so suddenly undeceived."

"I can allow for some, but not for Sir Robert Fane, whom I considered too much a man of the world to be surprised at anything."

"Do you see how expressive her countenance is? I can read her thoughts at once."

"Yes; there is no difficulty in diving to the bottom of her character; you can understand it all in five minutes."

Meantime Prissy, who was beaming with delight at Marion's looking so pretty, was undergoing a cross-questioning from *Nos.* 1 and 2 young ladies, who had originally been the spreaders of those reports about the bride that were now so abruptly contradicted.

"Miss Flower, I thought you told us that Mrs. Godfrey Asheton's mother was an Indian Princess."

"Me!—me say that! No, that I did'nt. Why, its no such thing; so how could I say it?"

No. 2. "We certainly inferred from you that she was born in India."

Prissy. "Well! that does'nt make her an Indian Princess any how. She was a Miss Aubrey."

No. 1. "You did not tell us how lovely she is."

Prissy. "Well! because she looks so well

to-night—I never saw her look better; and besides, I don't care much about beauty. I like nice people."

No. 2. "You see every one is much astonished. They all thought Mrs. Godfrey Asheton was a very dark—would be almost a black woman."

Prissy (aghast). "My goodness! what a shame. I wonder what Mr. Asheton would say?"

No. 1. "Pray don't mention this idea now, it will do no good; only tell me, is she likely to be nice and good tempered?"

Prissy (angry). "Goodness gracious! now that's a greater shame. Of course, there never was any one so nice and good tempered."

CHAPTER XV.

AND HOW DIFFICULT IT IS WHEN THEY ARE NOT.

ALL the fêtes passed off remarkably well, and the introduction of Mrs. Godfrey Asheton to the world was *un fait accompli.*

Marion conducted herself admirably, that is, she was natural, and people forgave her for not being black. For they were disappointed. It is so pleasant to have something to say against those who think themselves superior to the rest of the world; and the introduction of a black woman

(princess or not) into so exclusive a family was a charming handle against them.

As the tide turned, it appeared likely to flow in the full flood of praise towards the bride, for, young as she was, the dawnings of different feelings from those of the Ashetons showed themselves in her.

And though she might not be able to effect much, during the life-time of the old people, great things would be expected of her afterwards, judging by her sweet countenance.

Sir Robert, upon further acquaintance, was rather inclined to hedge his bet, for the sake of his right hand, and compromise for five hundred guineas, instead of a thousand. For her total want of education, her submissive gentleness, made that expressive chin of no effect. She might have strength of character, but the odds now were, whether she would discover her own

powers or not. Yet he liked her very much, spite of the injury she had done him in marrying Godfrey Asheton—liked her sufficiently to have no engagement with either the Duke or Earl for full ten days. He was a great admirer of pretty women, but as yet they had principally been of the handsome, stylish sort who could bandy a few witticisms with him, rather at the expense of his good opinion of them.

But Marion's unaffected, not to say artless, conversation was new to him.

And in this world what charms like novelty? Lady Fane pronounced her "delightful—the dearest little thing in the world." And Master Fane seemed to think his parents' example worthy of imitation, for he had, on more than one occasion, emerged voluntarily from the folds of his mother's dress, to listen to Marion's tales of foreign birds and flowers, rewarding her for

this effort at amusing him by various little tokens of his approbation, pulling out the comb that fastened up her long curls, stealing her gloves, and tying her handkerchief into knots. All of which undesirable marks of affection were pronounced by his mother "as delightful traits in her darling."

Mrs. Trevor found reason to think that her first idea of Marion's unfitness to be made into an Asheton would be discovered as another positive proof of her superior forethought and wisdom. She did not improve in the estimation of her sister-in-law as the days went by.

Beginning with an early determination never to like the person who should stand between her and the coveted name and position she was so truly fitted for, she was further inclined to be indignant at the high place she had gained in the love of old Mr. Asheton.

"He was positively infatuated by her," as she remarked to her mother, "who, she was glad to perceive, was not run away with by merely the prettiness of a face."

In addition, having always deemed it her duty to dictate to and look down upon her eldest sister, to prevent her, as an heiress, from being thoroughly spoilt, the knowledge that she highly approved of young Mrs. Asheton, had kissed and greeted her as a sister ("which," again remarked Mrs. Trevor, "I intend to do, when she has proved herself worthy to be so"), was enough of itself to point out to Mrs. Trevor how she must act. "Cecilia, having forgotten what was due to herself as well as her brother, should be able to take Mrs. Trevor as her example, in whose character she would find nothing weak or injudicious."

For a little time these feelings smothered in Mrs. Trevor's bosom for want of a fitting

confidante, but an accidental speech of Sir Robert's, regarding Miss Beatrice Flower's not having that cousinly regard for Mrs. Godfrey Asheton that her half-sister possessed, supplied her with this necessary article.

"I have a great opinion of Beatrice, my dear Robert; you may be sure she has good reason for withholding her regard."

"Very good, indeed," answered Sir Robert, drily; "she had decided to be Mrs. Godfrey Asheton herself."

"Not at all; I know, and who can know better, that no such thought ever entered her head. In fact, she said to me in confidence, more than once, she never could think of even the presumption of accepting Godfrey."

"Humph! that looks very like as if such a thought had entered her head very often."

"Very, very much the reverse, Robert; she knew, she felt that it must be an unequal, if not an unhappy match, that united an Asheton to the Flower family. But I shall make it my business to discover upon what grounds she places her indifferent opinion of her cousin. It will be my duty to discover what her faults are, that at all events one member of the family (not infatuated) may be prepared to cope with, and eradicate them if possible."

"Pray do, and let me know what they are; at present, I acknowledge that whenever I look into her face, I quite forget the injury she is likely to do me."

"So like men, at least some men; fortunately Trevor is of precisely the same opinion that I am; her beauty is nothing to that of Beatrice."

"True, fair sister, true; yet there is something of the kingdom above in the blue

eyes of the one, and a good deal of the world below in the dark orbs of the other. They rather remind me, sitting side by side, of the impersonification of the good and bad angels that attend at our birth; and faith, I don't so much wonder we unhappy mortals are so often drawn astray. One cannot think one is going to perdition in the company of a being beautiful as Beatrice."

"Pray, Sir Robert, remember to whom you are speaking, and of whom — a particular friend of mine. I am unable to comprehend to what your remarks allude."

"Then oblige me by not attempting, my dear Ellinor; it is not at all worth your while."

"It is worth everyone's while to gain information."

"Then you will find the full explana-

tion of my remarks in a book of eastern fables. At present, farewell."

Mrs. Trevor "talked over" Mrs. Godfrey Asheton with her cousin Beatrice to her heart's content, and was amazingly alarmed when she discovered that she knew not a word of French, was ignorant of Italian, and incapable of playing one bar of music.

"Good heavens!—oh, good heavens! And of course, my brother is ignorant of this terrible fact?"

"Not at all. I took the earliest opportunity of informing him, not only of that, but that she had been, the whole of her life, brought up in barracks."

"Gracious heavens! and if the world should ever discover this?"

"I think it is pretty well known already. Marion, I know, never denies it; in fact, tells it without reserve or confusion."

"A proof—a positive proof of her neglected education. My dear Beatrice, why did you not write to warn me?"

"My dear madam, how could I conceive that your brother, so singularly sensitive, would think of her for a moment? But I imagine he was led into making an offer sooner than he intended, that is, if he intended making her one at all, by the conduct of my cousin Julian."

Here Miss Beatrice gave a highly coloured narrative of the whole of that interesting affair, not disguising that she was the original cause of his being sent for, with the praiseworthy object of removing Marion entirely from the notice of Mr. Asheton.

"Oh, my dear Beatrice, why—why did you not insist upon her marrying Count Julian? We should then have been spared this disgrace."

Even Beatrice winced at this remark,

and her cheek coloured high; but people who take evil spirits into their bosoms, are compelled to swallow nauseous morsels now and then, so she gulphed it down, and answered calmly:—

"I did everything. I urged Julian to propose again and again. I persuaded him it was nothing but that silly girlism, so conspicuous in Marion; in fact, I have ruined his happiness for ever, I fear, and did no good towards effecting the separation —perhaps, indeed, hastening it."

"Do you mean to say that the Count di Ramiano still loves her?"

"To so violent a degree, they fear his reason is materially injured. He cannot be trusted anywhere alone; in fact, I will acknowledge to you, he is in the hands and care of a keeper for the insane."

"Good heavens! and she so heartless! But does she know all this?"

"Of course; I have told her everything; and, I must do her the justice to say, she feels it deeply. I can make her unhappy for the day, if I mention his name."

"Really! Now I consider that remarkably strange in her; I hardly think it quite right she should feel so much, being Mrs. Godfrey Asheton."

"She is very childish, you know — all her feelings are spontaneous."

"Do you think she repents having reduced him to this state?"

"I suppose so."

Here a little mad particle in Mrs. Trevor's brain came in contact with a very wicked one in that of Beatrice; both started into life and took root.

CHAPTER XVI.

RELATES HOW MR. TREVOR, HITHERTO MERELY AN APPENDAGE OF MRS. TREVOR'S, CAUSES A DOMESTIC EARTHQUAKE.

It was out of all reason to suppose that Mrs. Trevor was capable of keeping her tongue silent upon such an important matter as Marion's deficient education.

She rather feared attacking her father; but, apparently unconscious that very few barbarians would have resorted to the little-

ness that she, an Asheton Trevor, was indulging, conceived it to be an admirable stroke of policy to question Marion of her former life, before her father-in-law.

Mrs. Trevor. "Marion, have you read this last little work, sent to me by a friend for my approbation, before it is given to the world?"

Mr. Asheton. "How could my little May see it, then, my dear Ellinor?"

Mrs. Trevor. "I brought it here, my dear father, with me, and I thought that naturally the title would excite her curiosity—'France et Angleterre, Etude Sociale et Politique'—a matter of such vital importance."

Mr. Asheton. "Of no use to May Flower; she does not understand French.

Mrs. Trevor. "Then you know it, my dear father. What is to be done?"

Marion. "Godfrey intends becoming my

tutor. I shall learn; ah! with more quickness than any other girl, I know, taught by such a master."

Mrs. Trevor. "I beg your pardon, French is not to be learned grammatically and profoundly, except from the nursery. How long did our French governess remain with us, my dear father?"

Mr. Asheton. "Many years, my child; perhaps ten."

Mrs. Trevor. "There, you hear; and except that I have made a point of continuing my education, ever since I had a daughter, and thus may be an exception to the general rule, I am persuaded that Cecilia, as well as most other girls, after ten years incessant study, know it only superficially."

Mr. Asheton. "Very sad for you, my little May; but I know you will be very apt. My dear Cecilia was the sweetest

tempered child, I know, but she had not your quickness, my Ellinor."

Mrs. Trevor. "I class her among the generality, my dear father. And though Marion, under Godfrey's tuition, may, in a manner, learn French sufficiently to deceive others, less fortunate than myself, I fear it will never do away with the sad effect of her having lived and been brought up in —barracks!"

Mr. Asheton (startled). "My dear!"

Marion. "My mother always accompanied her father and mother, and afterwards her husband, and they were with their regiments almost entirely."

Mrs. Trevor. "But *we* never saw your mother."

Marion. "Ah, if any of you had seen my mother, no one would have thought of me. I never saw anyone so fair—never knew anyone so good."

Mrs. Trevor. "It is right a daughter should think well of her mother."

Marion (indignantly). "Think well of my mother! People did not stay at thinking well of her! She was idolised. The Commander-in-chief had hot tears running down his face, when they told him that he had lost two officers he loved so well—General and Colonel Flower—found side by side on that terrible battle-field. But he shut himself up when he knew that the good angel of the regiment was gone; and all men mourned her as if they had lost the dearest thing on earth to them—and so she was."

Mrs. Trevor was, figuratively speaking, "shut up." Astonished at Marion's excitement, amazed that a person bred and born in a regiment, should be mourned as only Ashetons ought to be;—vanquished as regarded any knowledge of what a

regimental life really was, she remained silent.

Mr. Asheton (tenderly, with his hand upon her drooping head). "My poor May Flower."

Marion. "But God is good to her, not only in giving her another grandfather, a Godfrey, a home like this; but—but—I shall see them all again—we shall meet to part no more."

Mrs. Trevor could as little understand the feelings that imparted such a glow to Marion's countenance, as the indignation she had shown before. Nothing but a vague species of insignificance filled her mind, a most unusual sensation for her, and so uncomfortable that she was the more inclined to dislike Marion than ever. "A little foolish enthusiast," thought she, "with a perfectly unregulated mind. Poor, poor Godfrey; but he will find me ever

the same." She quietly left the room, and meeting Sir Robert, thought proper to inform him of Miss Flower's account of her cousin's education.

"Knows nothing!" Then I would advise you to waste no more money on the education of your daughters. Brought up in barracks! You had better get Trevor into a militia regiment, and try what it is like."

Her mother listened with due attention to the remarks of her favourite daughter, and agreed with her upon the whole; but knowing the fact already, she had so far got over any distress she might have upon the subject, that Mrs. Trevor was more inclined to mourn over her composure, than any of the others.

Lastly, she sounded Godfrey, and was quickly silenced, to her inward indignation, by his answers.

"My dear Ellinor, it was for that ignorance I married her. It will now be my own fault if she learns what is not compatible with my ideas of female education."

Thus Mrs. Trevor was reduced to a state that either might break out in open war against the new Mrs. Asheton, or induce her to leave the field at once, and yield up the sway at Asheton Court for good. Fate held the balance even for a time, when Mr. Trevor unwittingly sent up one scale to the very beam, and it was on this wise that he affected it.

One morning, as Marion was feeding her numerous pets, at an hour when both hosts and guests were hardly risen, she unexpectedly encountered Mr. Trevor, peering about, apparently in an unhappy perplexity.

"Can I do anything for you, Mr. Trevor? Have you lost anything?"

"No, no, I thank you; nothing. I was merely looking, casually, by the way."

"Lost your way?" asked Marion as he paused.

"Yes—no—a little, perhaps. So excellent a young lady — kind heart, sweet countenance—I was looking for a little new milk."

"New milk here; — among the evergreens?"

"No, no, I mean, of course—'tis the dairy I was looking for. I think—I remember me, it was near here."

"I will show it to you, Mr. Trevor; but would it not be as well to ring and order—"

"No, no; oh, no, no—thank you, my excellent Ellinor, admirable mother, she does not affect new milk, and my little girls, certainly, excellent constitutions, yet, I think,

a little pale—they do so love a little new milk."

"I understand now, Mr. Trevor, you wish for some milk for my little nieces."

"Excellent creature—just so—they will be with me shortly, at eight o'clock. They remain with me the spare time their nurse wishes for her breakfast, and—and they expect me to give them some little thing — not much, no, for my fond Ellinor, ever tender for their health, restricts their too ardent appetites; yet they grow, little dears, and their fondness for milk is very, very great. A doctor—whom I just consulted promiscuously—rather thin I fancied they looked, he ordered new milk."

"Pray, say no more, Mr. Trevor, I am sure they may have as much as they choose."

"Not so; excellent young lady, highly principled, truly; I give them just a little

at this early hour, their nurse being absent."

"You wish no one to know they have it?"

"Ah! yes; just so, exactly. The doctor told me they were full young to be on the Homœopathic system for food."

"Will you come with me; or shall I bring a little milk to you, where you receive your children?"

"Admirable, truly admirable; at eight o'clock, in the small library, we shall be waiting. Will you be so kind as to tender this to the dairy-maid?"

"No; I cannot do that, you must do it yourself; besides, I had better take the milk as for myself, it appearing you do not wish it known that the little girls are to have it."

"Most true, excellent thought—admirable young lady."

Marion left him, still bowing and apostrophising her. She had imbibed no great interest for him before, and now he appeared in her eyes as most contemptible.

Nevertheless, she went to the dairy, begged for a bowl of the beautiful fresh milk, not long brought in, asked for some thick slices of bread and butter, or two rolls, and requesting that this primitive refection might be prepared every morning, and placed in the small library by eight o'clock, she bore off her prize to the expectant Mr. Trevor.

His gratitude and delight were equally revolting to Marion's simple nature; and she was about to retire, when they heard the pattering of little feet, and anon, a knock at the door. Mr. Trevor hastily threw the newspaper he was reading over the tray, so as to conceal it, and then, in a voice

most ludicrously different from that in which he had addressed Marion, said—

"Come in."

A stout, forbidding-looking woman ushered in the two meek Miss Trevors, who each made a profound curtsey.

"Thank you, my good nurse. I trust the young ladies have been all you could wish?"

"Pretty good, sir," answered she, in a short, sharp voice, indicative of a temper to match. "Where's your curtsey to young Madam Asheton?" she whispered angrily to the children, giving them each a push.

The two little girls executed a curtsey to Marion.

"I shall not like them to curtsey to me, nurse, for the future," said Marion, coming forward, "they must greet me thus—" and she kissed them both, they

looking vastly more alarmed than so simple an act might have warranted.

"You are very good, madam;" and with a parting shove, and injunction to "mind their manners," the nurse withdrew.

When it was really certain she was gone, both the little girls turned suddenly round and bolted the door, by the joint efforts of their little weak fingers. They then ran to their father.

"Papa, papa, what have you got for us—make haste, we are so hungry. Emma had no tea last night, because she was naughty, and I had to hide some of my bread for her."

During this speech they were rummaging their father's pockets, and drew from them pieces of bread, evidently taken from the dinner table, some cheese, biscuits, and a small bunch of raisins, none of which were improved by having been shut up in Mr.

Trevor's pockets. But they devoured them ravenously.

"My darlings—my loves," said he, kissing them as if he was still half afraid Mrs. Trevor might be peeping through the key-hole. "See, see what I have got for you!" and he withdrew the newspaper.

Their cry of delight was smothered, as they suddenly remembered Marion.

"She will tell—she will tell," they murmured.

'No, no, be sure I won't," said Marion, quite content to bear her share in the deceit. "And every morning you shall have the same."

Her pity for them and her contempt for their father grew every moment stronger as she saw their delight and witnessed their excessive enjoyment of so much wholesome food. Moreover, uninteresting little things as they were, it was very pretty to see

their fondness for each other; and though drinking out of the same bowl, and eating of the same bread and butter, they yet kept saying to each other:—

"Emma, do taste now, it's nicer than ever."

"Etta, you must eat a bit of my slice —I am sure yours cannot be so good."

And they would watch the effect of each recommendation with the highest delight.

Their father kept on a buzzing murmur of—

"Little darlings — poor loves — angelic young lady—everlasting gratitude," and the like.

But all Marion's pleasure in regarding them vanished when, having drank the last drop, and eaten up the last crumb, they changed at once into the little formal Miss Trevors, Emma saying, "Etta, can you see anything?" and Etta in answer, rubbing all

traces of milk from her sister's lips, who did the same for her.

"Oh, Mr. Trevor," exclaimed Marion, tears filling her eyes at such practised deceit in little things so young, and though she said no more, her eyes reproached him, until he reddened up to the small thin hairs that crowned his head.

But he answered nothing; at all times he was rather deficient in speech, and rightly interpreting his look of confusion, Marion withdrew, sad to think what sort of beings the Miss Trevors would become, under the different courses pursued by their father and mother.

Now this secret, only known to Mrs. Godfrey Asheton, Mr. and the Miss Trevors, and partially the dairy-maid, became a blazing fact to the whole world, through the maladroitness of Sir Robert Fane.

Feelingly alive to the pale looks of Mrs.

Godfrey Asheton and her somewhat saddened spirits, Sir Robert one morning, after urging her to partake of various delicacies at breakfast, remarked:—

"But I know it is useless—you, my dear sister, have your breakfast at a more healthy hour than we do, and of more wholesome viands. I think, Cecilia, it would benefit you to adopt your new sister's habit, and breakfast at eight o'clock, on a bowl of new milk and a piece of brown bread."

Marion blushed deeply, and glanced at Mr. Trevor, while Mrs. Trevor exclaimed:—

"Absurd, quite absurd to affect such diet, but it shows from whence these tastes arise. I mean, in fact, that milk and brown bread are now quite exploded articles of diet in any abode but farm-houses or low cottages. You can trace their effect upon the blowsy complexions and thick skins of girls brought up on this food; I

never permit my girls to touch either. Tea, weak, with one teaspoonful of the richest cream, is all I allow, and you see them—no complexions can be clearer. Cream is—"

Here Mrs. Trevor proceeded to explain the properties of cream, and why it was more wholesome than milk in it, during which Marion recovered her complexion. Mr Trevor had not evinced the slightest emotion from the first, and looked now perfectly wooden.

Thus the danger might have been warded off, had not Mrs. Trevor wound up her peroration by saying:—

"But why on earth Marion is not able to eat her breakfast with us, of the things provided for us, I am quite unable to define."

"Precisely the remark I was about to make, my dear Ellinor," said Godfrey.

"I take no breakfast until I take it here, with you," remarked Marion, again sending an appealing look to Mr. Trevor. He only looked more wooden.

Godfrey rang the bell, and desired the servant, when he appeared, to ask who had milk and bread for breakfast in the morning, and by whose orders.

"Mine are the orders," said Marion, as the servant withdrew.

Sir Robert had seen the appealing look to Mr. Trevor.

"And Emma and Etta have what is brought," said he.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Mrs. Trevor, "absurd!—allow me to ring, my dear mother; you shall hear from their own lips how untrue this assertion is."

Alas for the morals of the poor little girls! Emma said she did not know the taste of new milk.

Etta declared pretty much the same, and both put on countenances as imperturbable as their father's.

Marion looked from one to the other in dismay, and as Mrs. Trevor broke out in hasty, indignant upbraidings, and Godfrey looked at her as he had never done before, astonished and stern, she felt a strange choking sensation, a fluttering at her heart. She suddenly put an end to all further remarks, by fainting away.

CHAPTER XVII.

FULL OF MORAL REFLECTIONS, WHICH END IN EVERY-DAY FACTS.

INSIGNIFICANT, not to say childish, as such scenes described in the last chapter are, yet of such are half the ills of human tempers made up. These little beginnings form the nucleus of wicked deeds, that appal one half mankind, and shock the other. It is to them we owe hatred, envy, malice. From them proceed violence, passion, murder. Let us not think lightly of

the first beginnings of ill-will: it takes but a little matter to turn it into hatred.

People full of themselves, their own rules, their indomitable wishes, are always slow in action. Thus Marion had fainted and been caught in the arms of Sir Robert (who privately thought it the wisest thing she could do), while Godfrey was yet conjecturing how he should deport himself towards her regarding this affair of the Miss Trevors, and their supposed early breakfast.

His father was hanging over his darling May Flower, calling upon her in moving terms, before he realised that Mrs. Godfrey Asheton had really, without notice, without giving him any preparation, fainted away.

But as the perception dawned on him, there was no lack of tenderness then. Taking her up in his own arms, with his face as white as hers, whispering soft words

of love in her ear, he bore her up to her chamber, and sternly bidding Mrs. Trevor stay where she was (she, of course, fussing after them), he permitted no one to attend to her but himself.

"My Marion," said he fondly, as he saw her colour returning, and the tears beginning to flow, "no one is here but myself; take courage, love, and let me look into your sweet eyes."

"What has happened to me, Godfrey?" she whispered.

"I know not, love; but that you fainted, and why, you must tell me yourself."

"It was those little girls. Oh, Godfrey, such deceit!"

"Nay, love, you were moved by some other cause; besides, Ellinor cannot be mistaken."

And these latter words caused the pallid hue again to spread over Marion's

brow. There was in his voice, if not in his manner, an unyielding solidity. Whoever might be wrong in this case, it could not be one born an Asheton.

"You are pale again, Marion; are you sure you are well?"

"No; I am ill. I have felt ill for some time. I am not habituated to such late hours. My dresses are so heavy, I feel faint in them. That is your mother's step, it is she who is knocking at the door."

"Godfrey, I must speak to you immediately," said Mrs. Asheton, outside the door.

"Come in, my dear mother, Marion is better."

"Not on any account; I must speak to you alone."

As Marion lay extended on the sofa, after Godfrey had tenderly kissed and left her, she heard the conversation between her

husband and mother more distinctly from her recumbent posture.

"No one, not a single soul. It must have been that which made her faint."

"Impossible, mother, why should it?" Nothing could be more indignant than Godfrey's voice.

"Marion tried to rise, and warn them they were speaking too loudly.

"He crossed before the window at the very time. She is very sensitive, you know."

"Faint for him! faint at the sight of—"

Marion heard no more, for, startled by her husband's voice, and the efforts she made to reach the door, once more the room seemed to go round with her, and as she touched the handle, she fell heavily against it.

When she recovered her senses, she found herself laid upon her own bed, partially undressed, the room darkened. As she grew accustomed to the gloom, she recognised Dr. Ford, Mrs. Asheton, and Pinner near it.

"Am I ill?" she asked.

"Yes, my dear young lady; you must remain quiet. Mr. Godfrey is close by—within call, if it would calm you to see him."

He soon came; and, though it was evident to the quick eye of his wife that something unusual had occurred, she suffered herself to be well content to lie still, holding his hand.

Towards evening she was so much better, she was able to sit up; and then she was told by the doctor she must guard her life carefully, for the sake of one unborn.

She smiled a little soft smile of great happiness, as she glanced up at Godfrey.

He bent his head over her, and whispered all he had to say, and, satisfied that whatever had occurred to upset his usual equanimity, it was this happy intelligence, she grew hourly better. Only when they were all gone down to dinner, did the remembrance of the little Trevor girls return to her mind. Full of strange inexplicable thoughts, those thoughts that come unbidden to the heart of a young and sensitive being, when she first learns that another life is bound up in that of her own, Marion prayed earnestly to God for help to do good towards the little misguided girls. Moved to do so, because she dared hardly pray for that other life, as yet unknown to her, and yet must she beseech God for good to them in the firm hope that she might obtain a blessing also for the unborn.

Tender and careful were they all of her; and as old Mr. Asheton was visibly the worse

for all the late dinners and gaiety, he and Marion were alike treated as invalids, and had early meals together.

Then did Marion beseech the kind grandfather to have the little girls down to see him for an hour every evening, while the late dinner was being served. And as he whispered in her ear his happiness at the news he had heard, he besought her not again to incur the dangers of fainting, by over care for them.

"I like everyone under my roof to be happy," said he, "but you are my dearest and first care."

"They are very fond of each other, grandpapa. It is their father who is to blame. I think they would not be so deceitful, if he was more open with Ellinor, and pointed out the want of more food and clothing."

"I should like them to be happy, poor

little things," again reiterated the old gentleman, "and therefore I must do what their father neglects."

"At present, let us send for them now, we can talk to them quietly. It dwells on my mind—such practised deceit. And, grandfather, if you ordered some chocolate and cake for us all. I think, perhaps, everyone would be happy then."

"Dear, sweet May, where did you learn to be so thoughtful for others?"

"Love makes every heart so. We all loved each other in my first home—to that point, the pleasure of the others was the chief delight of the one. It was not so much what we could give up, as that none should think there was a sacrifice in the matter. Grandpapa, my people were very good, so simple and so religious; I can compare our home to the many different places and homes into which I have been

since God took them, and in none have I seen such faith and goodness."

"Well, love, you much teach us these pleasant ways. I would fain look back on my past life with satisfaction; but, May Flower, I cannot say, as I would wish to do, in the presence of the Almighty, that I have thought only of my God. I fear me it is the other way."

"I think we are all faulty in that respect."

Mr. Asheton shook his head, as if to say that was no excuse for him.

"We will send for my little granddaughters," said he at last.

They were some time making their appearance, and their nurse was apparently bent on remaining with them. The little girls, too, rather clung to her, as if afraid of the kind grandpapa. But in truth it was Marion whom they feared, the very gentle-

ness of her looks upbraiding them. By degrees, the withdrawal of their nurse, the appearance of chocolate and cake, the knowledge that they were to partake of luxuries that favoured more of fairy-land than reality, thawed their little congealed frames.

It was with a pity almost akin to tears that their grandfather watched their delight, and the little traits of affection that they exhibited towards each other.

"You are sure your chair is as comfortable as mine, Etta," whispered Emma, in a sort of little old fashioned imitation of her mother's manner.

"It is very comfortable, indeed; but is your piece of cake as large as mine?"

It was then that Marion, kneeling down between them, asked in a low voice, "If they knew the meaning of truth?"

Blushing, hesitating, and confused, glancing at their grandfather, and again at

Marion, they simultaneously commenced a little crying duet.

"We are not so naughty as Edward," said one.

"No, indeed; we are much gooder," said the other.

"He pinches Emma—"

"And he scratches Etta—"

"And he burns holes everywhere—"

"And he breaks everything—"

"And he tells—"

"Yes, that we—"

"Do all this mischief—"

"And it is he all the while."

It is impossible to express the ludicrous manner in which the poor little maidens poured out, in sing-song fashion, this catalogue of crimes, and the sort of triumph with which they ended.

"But because Edward is naughty, you need not be so."

"Can we be good as you?"

"Yes; but then I cannot say what is untrue."

"Then we cannot be like you; we said so last night."

"Come, promise that you will try. Grandmama is going to give a present to the one that always speaks the truth."

"I hope Emma will get it."

"No, no, Etta must have it."

"My little darlings, come, kiss your grandpapa; you shall each have a present for being such good little sisters. Now, tell me what you would like best."

"Chocolate and cake," said both at once.

"Nay, that you shall have every day."

"A muff for Emma's hands; she has sad chilblains."

"But summer is coming," suggested Marion.

"Two large dolls; fine waxen babies," suggested the old gentleman, who could think of nothing else.

The little girls' eyes sparkled with delight; but they said, with the utmost primness—

"The Miss Trevors are too old for dolls."

Their grandfather could not but smile.

"Then," said he, "think over it, and let me know to-morrow, when you come for chocolate and cake."

CHAPTER XVIII.

TREATS OF DIFFERENT TEMPERS AND FEELINGS.

Sir Robert Fane had suddenly departed—a long and mysterious interview with Godfrey and Mrs. Asheton had preceded his departure; and, if none of the gentry in Asheton Court knew it, some of the servants were cognizant of the fact that he was not alone in the carriage as it drove away from the back premises.

A hurricane can only express the storm raised by Mrs. Trevor, upon receiving a

remonstrance from her father on the defective morals of the faultless Miss Trevors, founded on Mrs. Godfrey Asheton's statements. Not only was Marion utterly swamped, and borne away in a torrent of invectives, but Mr. Asheton himself was reduced to a state of mental bewilderment. Persuaded out of what he had seen with his own eyes, apologising for false statements, that he knew to be true, made to eat his own words, until he did not know what he said, he was very nearly driven into a severe fit of illness.

Mrs. Asheton upbraided him, Godfrey wondered at him, Lady Fane condoled with him, and Mrs. Trevor stormed on.

Fortunately, no power or persuasion of hers could induce Godfrey to let her speak to Marion on the subject.

Any danger to the future heir was not

to be incurred for the injured honour of the best Asheton among them. Thus, though Marion fell in Mrs. Asheton's estimation, in her husband's, even in the fond love of her father-in-law, she was not told of it. The old gentleman had to bear the whole brunt of it; and as that was very small satisfaction to Mrs. Trevor, who had made him retract and apologise, until she herself was tired, and feeling that she must "speak or die," to the real culprit, at last she bore herself off to Mannering Hall, accompanied by the unfortunate little beings of the whole turmoil, and their father.

So strongly was Ellinor's superiority a fact in the family—so vehemently had she pictured her wrongs — so guilty did Mr. Asheton feel, as she painted his sudden trust and faith in one so young, so lately known, that he felt he could hardly do

enough for her, and was ready to blame himself, as well as Marion, to the fullest extent Mrs. Trevor could wish.

But he joined with Godfrey in strenuously averting anything that might cause a recurrence of fainting fits. The heir of the Ashetons was to be no sickly puny witling. After his birth, Mrs. Trevor might then "have it out" with one who "already showed the meddling disposition of her Aunt Flower."

That remark made a deep hole in Godfrey's heart, and something else besides; none of Marion's sweet ways had power to efface either.

Meantime, amid it all, the glow of happiness made all other ills painless. He was to be a father—he might, from the hour of its birth, rear up a being who should become that companion he had so long sought in vain through this ungenial world to find.

No longer solitary, spirit-weary, or morbidly sad, he had now a work to do, that was to benefit posterity as well as himself—the world should now see a perfect specimen of the genus man. An Asheton brought up and educated solely by an Asheton.

For twenty-eight years he had lived without an object, been sensible of no strong sensations but a desire to avoid contact with the obnoxious beings by whom he was surrounded. Now, like the little stream suddenly meeting with the great ocean, and pouring itself out without hesitation, with blind confidence, into the world of waters from which it never returned, did Godfrey give himself up, with an enthusiasm bordering on folly, to the contemplation of the task before him. He literally thought of nothing else, otherwise he would not have been blind to

the sensitive heart of Marion suddenly shutting itself up to him. With all their care, she quickly saw the change in those around her.

The fond expressions suddenly dropped by Mr. Asheton, his little hasty reproofs, his fears about one thing, and his hopes about another, all told her of some secret influence that, for the time being, had closed his heart against her.

Mrs. Asheton no longer gave her the place as of an honoured daughter of the house, but rather treated her as a little wayward child, repelling, in a manner that ordinary mortals would have thought rude, any further attempts at intimacy with the inhabitants of the Woodhead.

Lady Fane, too, added to Marion's perplexity by sending Edward out of the room whenever she entered, by constant

remarks on her sister's injudicious management, yet still more severe ones on those who could dare to pass judgment on her. Even her gentle nature could not forgive a Flower presuming to find fault with an Asheton.

That Mrs. Trevor should depart without thinking it necessary to pay her sister-in-law the common compliment of taking leave, gave Marion an idea as to whom she was indebted for this change in the affections of her new family. The accidental encounter of the little girls just before they left, which they did subsequently to that of their father and mother, in a hired chaise, with nursemaid and packages, established the fact.

Of course Mrs. Trevor intended the chaise with her daughters to leave immediately after the carriage that contained her and her husband.

But servants generally have taken a diploma in the art of delay. And during the time they were indispensably doing nothing, the little girls ran breathlessly into the small study now sacred to Marion and her sofa.

"Aunt May, pray forgive us," they both whispered. "We love you better and better. Pray kiss us, and remember Emma and Etta. We can never be like you, but we can always wish we were. And though mamma says you are so naughty and tell lies, we know you don't—we know it is all our faults. And, Aunt May, we promise we will say nothing untrue, if we possibly can."

Having sung out this little duet, they ran from the room as suddenly as they entered it.

Marion's heart was a brave one as to endurance. And though to be loved was

necessary to her nature, she felt no consciousness of having deserved to lose the affection of those around her. This made her bear with unwavering sweetness the present mood of the Asheton family. But, above all, she carried in her heart the hope, the knowledge, that soon she should have a love all her own—that ere many months had passed, the little lonely orphaned girl should press to her heart a living object, which, though small, would fill up all the vacant places in her affections; and strongly as Godfrey might feel on the matter, his thoughts faded into nothing, when compared with the ardent feelings of one whose sympathies came pure from heaven itself.

The little unborn babe appeared to her a link connecting her more closely with the spirits of her departed parents—a present sent to her from them, in which

she would be able to trace a likeness to each, and love it all the more. Neither did she forget her husband. As the mother of his child, she would have an undoubted claim upon his affections; no longer a dubious appendage to the family, an admitted member of it, but scarcely yet an honoured one, as the mother of an Asheton, she would become hallowed in their eyes.

For all this she could wait patiently until the birth of her child, not moved to feel even resentment towards those now so unjust to her, or Beatrice, who was cruelly unkind.

Marion sat on the rock seat, having walked there under the strict care of her husband. She rested, while he below, within her sight, walked to and fro by the side of the waves.

It was a most lovely day. Earth, air,

and sky, tinted with the hues of coming summer. One of those May days that begin in the morning with a touch of April, and end in the evening with the full warmth of June. The breath of the air was balmy, the smell of the flowers was fragrant, the bloom of the earth was fresh, while the hue of the sky only paled as you looked at the sea, and all the space of air was filled with the sweet summer sounds of birds, bees, and insects.

Marion could not help rejoicing in spirit over so much beauty, and her heart was as light with happiness as any of the winged creatures about her.

She compared her fortunes to the cloudless day before her, and thanked God with humility for the prospect. But as if in answer to the prayer, a shadow came over the fair sea. Looking up, she saw a storm cloud, hanging from the heavens

like a circular curtain, born up by cloudy rings, the darker folds of which stretched down, even until they touched the sea, which was rippled on its smooth surface with the stormy rain drops. She watched it passing slowly on, darkening every thing it passed over. "But," she said to herself, "I can see the blue sky behind, and everything looks fairer than it did before. The storm cloud has but brightened the day."

Hearing a footstep coming, her visionary thoughts gave place to reality.

It was Beatrice.

"So the tender and devoted husband has placed his treasure here, has he? I saw him pacing up and down on the sands, and concluded I should find you."

"I am so much better, I walk nearly every day now; my mother comes for me in the carriage soon."

"Yes, it is like the Ashetons truly.

Anything for themselves they will regard. But you need not take the flattering unction to your soul that it is for your sake."

"I am aware that I am in disgrace."

"You had judged better for yourself if you had accepted Julian. With him, at least you would been loved for yourself only."

"You forget, Beatrice, you are speaking to a wife."

"Yes, such a wife too! A child-wife! Shortly we shall know you only as the baby Asheton's mamma."

Beatrice saw that Marion was silent under her bitter scoffing, from some motive she did not understand, for there was no fear in her gaze—rather a sort of pity.

"Mrs. Trevor desired me to tell you, the first opportunity I had, she never could forgive you."

"Then she is to be pitied."

"Shall I tell her so from you? She is already your enemy; how can you cope with her if she becomes an active one?"

"I must take my chance."

"A poor one, let me tell you; I shall live to see you mourn the day you refused Julian."

Again no answer. Marion's face expressed all too strongly for the passionate Beatrice, her contempt.

"You are, and will be, to Godfrey Asheton nothing but the mother of his children. You disbelieve me? Why then had he that clause for a separate maintenance put into his marriage settlement?"

Marion's eyes asked her what she meant, though she said nothing.

"It is provided in your settlement that upon either of you expressing a wish to be separated, two thousand a year is to be your portion. Judge if Mr. Asheton could

have loved you, and yet demand such a clause?"

"He will love me, I have no fear;" yet the colour left Marion's cheek as she answered; then, it suddenly returning with a quick rush, she rose, confronting Beatrice — "Say to Mrs. Trevor, if indeed she sent me the message you now gave, that I grieve to have offended her, though I know not the cause. But say to Beatrice Flower that her cousin Marion contemns, spurns, hears not words that ought never to have been spoken to Mrs. Asheton. Now, I desire that you leave me. A minute more, and I shall think my cousin Beatrice lacks a woman's chief ornament, namely, her womanly thoughts."

For a moment Beatrice was confounded.

But flushing high with anger, she answered—

"If you again faint at sight of Count

Julian, you will afford Mr. Godfrey Asheton an opportunity of proving his intention to abide by that clause. Well, as he restrained himself once, he will not do so twice."

Marion's countenance expressed both indignation and astonishment; but as if disdaining to reply, she waved her hankerchief to her husband as a token that she was ready to join him.

"Well, as they kept their secret, they are in my power, those proud Ashetons. At any moment I can publish to the world that their new daughter, the fastidious Mr. Godfrey Asheton's wife, fainted at the sight of her former lover, and bethink you how they will like that."

Still no reply. Even the momentary indignation was gone.

In her intemperate mood, hot and angry flowed the words of Beatrice, furnished

with stings of bitter taunting, that recoiled back upon herself, for Marion's eyes still met hers in fearless innocence.

She heard, too, with the quick ear of love, her husband's step, and as he appeared in sight, she held Beatrice by her dress, for she started and turned, as if about to fly.

"Has Count Julian di Ramiano been here lately?" she demanded of Godfrey.

He could not but answer her with the same frankness with which she put the question.

"He passed the window as you fainted that morning. I thought it was the shock which caused you to do so."

"No; I did not see him; only now have I learnt he has been here."

"If Miss Flower has been the means of this explanation," said Godfrey, his eyes

bright and smiling, "I thank her, for indeed, May, I was unhappy about it."

"Is it this that causes my mother to be less kind to me?"

"I think more because of my sister Ellinor. Come home, love. I should like to tell her we have been mistaken, in this, at all events. Thank you much, Miss Flower."

And that latter young lady had the satisfaction of seeing Mr. Asheton escort his wife down the steep path with an attention and care that showed he was intent upon making up to her for past injustice. And she then and there experienced what many of us do, "how unruly is that little member, the tongue."

CHAPTER XIX.

WHICH DETAILS THE THEORY OF EDUCATION, ELUCIDATED BY ONE WHO WAS NEVER EDUCATED.

In addition to teaching Marion various little fragments of learning, not too tiresome to worry her, Godfrey Asheton set himself seriously to study the different modes of education, and the rules laid down by competent judges for the forming of the infant mind.

Scarcely considering Marion capable of giving an opinion on the matter; aware that his father, still more his mother, judged

that no education could have produced better results than that pursued in his case, Godfrey entered into a long correspondence with his favourite sister, Mrs. Trevor.

A theory is always admirable upon paper. It is only when put into practice, that it assumes that appearance of human frailty attendant upon all the works of man;—who that is born of a woman can conceive, execute and finish a work, and be able to lay his hand on his heart and say, "Behold, it is very good."

God-like may be the ideas, the thoughts, that a human heart can conceive, but man-like will be its execution, stamped with the mildew of imperfection.

Thus, Mr. Godfrey Asheton and Mrs. Trevor, between them, drew up a course of training and education that was to make a perfect gentleman of the unborn

heir. By "gentleman," be it understood they meant "the finished man."

Without giving his parents to understand that they had made one great mistake in educating him, it was owing to this mistake that he did not now take them into his councils. For he intended no such omission to befall his son. Both his sister and himself agreed thoroughly on this ground, which some weak-minded British father may think was, that Mr. Godfrey Ashton had never attended any public school, in which they guessed correctly. But in fact they assured themselves that to make a perfect, a finished English gentleman, it was absolutely necessary he should be brought up abroad.

On the classic ground of Italy would he become properly imbued with its glorious ancient language, its flowing musical modern tongue. From thence, he could im-

bibe the metaphysical profundities of German literature, and sun himself with the light laughter-loving pleasantries of the French school. Inhaling, withal, a contempt for the beef-eating, shop-keeping propensities of the English nation, standing out in bold relief among them as a "finished man."

He was to be a poet, a musician, a painter, a sculptor, an author—everything but a fox-hunting, sporting, joyous English squire. That is, if he did not show a talent in any of these accomplishments, at least he was to know enough to pass instant judgment upon any other proficient.

Mrs. Trevor wrote very good letters. They were to the point, and separated from her didactic voice, her opinions appeared less like oracles of divination. Besides, she read a good deal, and she

had no qualms of conscience about using the remarks of authors as if they were her own. It was a useless ceremony putting little commas at the beginning and ending of her quotations, for two reasons. The putting them deranged her ideas, in the first place, and of course Godfrey knew the books as well as herself, in the second.

But with all these advantages, Mrs. Trevor's "Letters upon Education," lacked one element. They had never been tested. In every line of her persuasive, invincible arguments for foreign education, you could trace the interesting fact that she had never been out of England in her life.

Thus, with her, it was as with idolaters. She worshipped she knew not what. Her very ignorance of anything continental invested it with the charms of mystery, and therefore, to her, of wonder and admiration.

No more thoroughly English family existed than the Ashetons, carrying their pride and exclusiveness so far, that it could only be expressed as the essence of over-refinement; tormenting to themselves, as it was insulting to others.

And in the small experience they had had of any other society than that about Asheton Court—where they ruled to the full bent of their crotchets—everything had tended to disgust them.

They were knocked about in London as obsolete; looked upon as country bores, most considerably in the way; and therefore, deriving no pleasure from annual visits there, they had long given up their town house, and were at present ignorant of the state of mad progression which was propelling all fast people in the metropolis.

A feeling of insecurity as to what they might encounter abroad, if their own

countrymen were so devoted to folly at home, had deterred the elder Ashetons from ever venturing across the Channel. Godfrey once went to Paris for a fortnight, and was highly impressed with the politeness and amiable frankness of the Parisians; and had he been a better French scholar, would have gone again; but he waited to learn the language more perfectly, having discovered that to read, write, and construe it, by no means assists you to speak it. And should he have met with a young Parisienne worthy of the honour, he could not have thought of proposing marriage to her, unless in the authorised idioms of her own language.

So in writing out the programme for the education of the future young Asheton, neither Godfrey nor his sister had any practical experience. They relied upon a beautiful theory.

This was enunciated by Mrs. Trevor in truly Johnsonian periods, sounding erudite and profound, driving "Locke on the Understanding," and "Watts on the Mind," quite into the shade.

Shutting himself up in a remote sort of Gothic temple, that served at one and the same time as a temple for a Diana, always standing in a lively attitude for hunting, but never advancing further, owing, as it appeared, to an elaborately carved Gothic doorway arresting and shocking her Grecian prejudices, and as a study, sacred to Mr. Godfrey Asheton's private use, and as an ornament to the extreme point of an old-fashioned English garden, he meditated and thought over a long letter received that morning from his sister.

"Yes, my Ellinor," he wrote in answer, "I can now, as you say, realise your feelings when you first became a mother. The

disappointments, the annoyances, the many vexations attendant upon every fresh coalition with so ungenial a world, are now atoned for. We have in prospect a society of our own, born of ourselves, reared according to our tastes, refined to the utmost extent of that almost unknown word—certainly utterly misunderstood by more than half the world.

"I can enter into those sad feelings of ill-construed motives that so spoilt your visit to us last May, and am the more able to assure you that never again shall your noble views be misinterpreted.

"If, as you say, I may be disappointed lest the mother of my child is not actuated by the high and disinterested views that actuate yourself (rather because she does not understand them, Ellinor, I can assure you, than the want of them) still I have you always to council me. Together we

can plan arrangements for our children's welfare; together we can make them all that we wish. Fear nothing with regard to my pretty Marion; I know she will feel but too happy to learn a mother's duties from us. Ah, my dear Ellinor, the only drawback to my pleasure is that my son is yet unborn. How many years I shall have to wait ere I see the fruition of all my hopes! But courage!—a short time ago I had not even this exquisite pleasure in prospect—this hope that has already almost made me in love with this world.

"Think of me, my dear Ellinor, when I see my son—when I look into his face, and foreshadow the realization of all my fondest wishes—the signs, unmistakable to a parent's eyes, of how the 'child will be father to the man.'

Mr. Asheton no doubt believed all this, and thought it very fine; but he was

roused from his three different enjoyments of "anticipation," "actual enjoyment," and "after reflection,"—all of which he had brought pellmell into his letter—by loud cries, a general hurry skurry, and a universal shouting of his own name.

He rushed out—he had known it was a momentous time. He had been aware of the advent of a stout female, a few days before. Of course the momentous time was come.

He was wrong—it was over.

"My dear, dear son!" exclaimed his father, meeting him and embracing him—tears and smiles making an April day of his venerable old face—"May would not have you disturbed."

"Oh, my son, my darling Godfrey," cried his mother; "dear little good thing—so patient and so delighted."

"Wish you joy, sir," said the butler,

with solemn propriety, all the footmen bowing in imitation.

"Health and happiness to the little darling," cried a host of weeping, excited maids.

"Here, here, this way, let him be the first. Make way, now, Godfrey — now, my dearest son."

And forthwith, in the arms of the aforesaid stout female, lay a little red mass of humanity, guiltless of eyes, deficient in nose, but amply gifted as regards mouth, which, wide open, gave the beholder a favourable view of an agonised little tongue, at the same moment that another organ was saluted by sounds resembling the strangled shrieks of a cat.

Dr. Ford came forward, and while Godfrey was speculating as to what quadruped, biped, or other animal on the face of the globe,

owned so extraordinary a production, said, "Congratulate you, Mr. Godfrey, the finest boy I ever saw."

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